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'Shivers down your spine': panoramas and the origins of the cinematic reenactment'

ALISON GRIFFITHS

1 'Brochure for *The Siege of Paris*
panorama (1877) painted by
Paul Philippoteaux on exhibition
daily at the corner of Columbus
Avenue and Ferdinand Street
Boston p 8 Theater
Collection New York Public
Library

2 'The Cyclorama *Scientific
American* vol 55 (1886), p 296
Emphasis mine The author is
referring to Paul Philippoteaux s
panorama *The Battle of
Gettysburg* painted in 1886,
which I discuss in greater depth
later in the essay

3 Monas N Squires Henry Lewis
and his mammoth panorama of
the Mississippi River' *Missouri
Historical Review* vol 27 (April
1933), p 246 cited in Bertha L
Heilbron 'Making a motion
picture in 1848 Henry Lewis on
the Upper Mississippi
Minnesota History vol 17, no
2 (1936) p 132 Heilbron
Making a motion picture
p 133 Joseph Earl Arrington
'William Burr s moving
panorama of the Great Lakes
The Niagara St Lawrence and
Saguenay Rivers', *Ontario
History* vol 51 no 3 (1959)
p 141 C W Ceram
Archaeology of the Cinema
(London Thames and Hudson
1965)

> *To realize that this magnificent pageant is, after all, only an
> illusion, requires a stronger mental effort than to accept it for
> reality* [1]
>   *While looking at the picture* he must live in its scene. [2]

The circular thrill: cinema and early panoramas

The proposition that nineteenth-century panoramas constitute
significant precursors to the twentieth-century motion picture is by
now familiar to film historians Indeed, long before contemporary art
historians and cultural theorists connected the hyperrealism of these
large-scale immersive paintings to the mechanized mimeticism of the
cinematic image, earlier historians had linked the two representational
forms. In 1933, Monas N Squires argued that panoramas of the
1840s and 1850s were 'ancestors of the modern moving picture', a
label endorsed three years later by Bertha L. Heilbron, who called
nineteenth-century panoramas 'travel "movies"' Similarly, in 1959,
panorama scholar Joseph Earl Arrington argued that the panorama
was indubitably the 'pre-photographic ancestor of the motion
picture', and in his 1965 book, *Archaeology of the Cinema*, C.W.
Ceram discussed several panoramic precursors of cinema. [3]

  If the analogy between cinema and panoramas seems obvious on
some levels, what is less clear is exactly *how* these representational

forms anticipated cinema, how their operational and aesthetic norms made them its striking antecedents Beyond addressing the general textual and phenomenological correspondences between panoramas and cinema (how the scale and hyperrealism of the panorama was proto-cinematic, for example), this essay examines how the panorama was discursively understood by certain spectators in distinctly cinematic terms One way to illuminate this connection is to focus on the reenactment as a structuring principle of both early cinema and panoramas. Not only was the reenactment a key organizing principle of many nonfictional panoramas[4] but, in a wider sense, it came to define the very idea of the panorama effect as one of revisitation, of witnessing again, in modified form. that which has occurred in a different time and place. In ways both similar to and distinct from cinema, panoramas laid claim to the historical and geographical real through an indexical bond. premissed on their status as topographically correct and authentic reconstructions of battles, landscapes or ancient antiquities such as the Acropolis in Athens

But while the panorama anticipated some of the phenomenological and discursive features of the cinematic reenactment, there were also important differences, the most obvious being that while the panorama *reconstructed* a scene from history, a newspaper headline event or the natural world, it did not literally reenact this event for the spectator. Because the panorama was an image frozen in time, the scene was not literally reperformed for the spectator as in a film reenactment of a battle or an execution; there was no *action per se* in the painting. However, if panorama exhibitors could not avail themselves of cinema's possibilities for literal reenactment (the panorama's only method of depicting the kinetic involved the physical movement of the canvas before the spectator in the case of the moving panorama or when dioramic lighting effects gave the impression of changes of time in Daguerre's diorama), they compensated by explicitly foregrounding the panorama's status as a *reconstitutive* mode of address Thus, the depicted events reassembled for the spectator were to be interpreted *as if* the action was happening along an immediate temporal and spatial presence and continuity. The reenactment as a cinematic trope may thus provide a useful theoretical frame for understanding the historical and formal links between the panorama and early cinema

The reenactment has assumed an ambiguous status in traditional cinema scholarship: easily identified. on the one hand, as a staple of both early actuality filmmaking and contemporary docudrama, the reenactment has nevertheless failed to generate as much detailed theoretical explication as its ubiquitous status – within both Hollywood and television 'infotainment' – would seem to invite While the reenactment has been the subject of some discussion, both descriptive and prescriptive, in standard documentary film texts. less attention has been paid to how its forms of spectatorial address were

4 There were many panoramas of fictional subjects including John Bunyan s *Pilgrim's Progress* and Milton s *Paradise Lost*

5   For more on the history of
    panoramas and their
    exploitation of the conceit of
    virtual travel see Alison
    Griffiths, "The largest picture
    ever executed by man"
    panoramas and the emergence
    of large-screen and 360-degree
    internet technologies, in John
    Fullerton (ed) Reception
    Studies in Film Television and
    Digital Culture (Sydney John
    Libbey Press 2003)
6   Stephan Oettermann, The
    Panorama History of a Mass
    Medium (New York Zone
    Books 1997) pp 101, 103
7   For more on panoramas see
    Oettermann, The Panorama;
    Ralph Hyde Panoramania! The
    Art and Entertainment of the
    'All-Embracing View (London
    Refoil Publications in
    association with the Barbican
    Art Gallery 1988) Richard
    Altick The Shows of London
    (Harvard, MA Belknap Press of
    Harvard University Press, 1978),
    John Francis McDermott The
    Lost Panoramas of the
    Mississippi (Chicago IL
    University of Chicago Press
    1958) Angela Miller The
    panorama, the cinema and the
    emergence of the spectacular,
    Wide Angle vol 18 no 2
    (1996), pp 34–69 Vanessa R
    Schwartz, Spectacular Realities
    Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-
    Siècle France (Berkeley CA
    University of California Press
    1998) pp 149–76
8   Lee Parry Landscape theater in
    America' Art in America
    vol 59 (December 1971) p 53
9   Evelyn J Fruitema and Paul A
    Zoetmulder, The Panorama
    Phenomenon, catalogue
    produced for the preservation of
    the Centarian Mesdag
    Panorama (The Hague Mesdag
    Panorama 1981) p 18

rehearsed in numerous precinematic entertainments. As interstitial texts, straddling 'high' and 'low' entertainment in their blending of the promotional discourses and artistic techniques of both fine arts and popular amusements, panoramas often evoked the reenactment experience. Offering facsimiles of actual events and geographical locales, promoters of the nineteenth-century panorama exploited its spectacular mode of address. A visit to a panorama promised a unique experience, offering an immersive representation of historical events and locales portrayed with a heightened sense of fidelity and verisimilitude. While similar claims of verisimilitude were offered on behalf of realist easel paintings at the time, three factors make panoramas unique as precursors to film reenactments first, the mode of spectatorship invited by their scale (unlike viewing easel paintings or photographs, spectators gazed at huge canvases that filled the space before their eyes); second, their status as technologies of virtual transport and invocation of presence as a constituent feature of the panoramic experience, and third, in the case of moving panoramas, their exhibition context – a fixed, as opposed to an ambulatory, mode of spectatorship, in which audiences sat in a darkened auditorium for the duration of a performance, complete with musical accompaniment and explanatory lecture.

Before examining the complex relationship between the wildly popular nineteenth-century panorama and the forms and practices of early cinema, a brief discussion of the origins of panoramas might be helpful. Panoramas were among the earliest (and most commercially successful) forms of mass visual entertainment, going in and out of fashion throughout the nineteenth century. Patented by the Irishman Robert Barker in 1787,[5] the first panorama premiered in London's Leicester Square in January 1792. Entitled A View of London, it began as a half-circle but, recognizing its success, Barker quickly extended it to a full circle Barker's painting stood fifteen feet high and stretched forty-five feet in diameter; visitors paid one shilling to enter the building and could also buy an orientation aid in the form of an anamorphotic (bird's eye view) diagram (figure 1) and a set of six aquatints [6] The 360-degree painting was suspended from the interior walls of a specially designed circular building within which was built a viewing platform (belvedere) for spectators to stand on (circular panoramas such as this were also called cycloramas between 1872 and 1885).[7] Responding to the phenomenal success of this panorama, in 1794 Barker built a ninety-foot rotunda in Leicester Square (called 'The Panorama') that also contained an upper circle for showing smaller paintings (figure 2).[8] The vellum (an umbrella-like canopy over the spectator's head) and bottom of the painting were concealed by a cloth of the same colour stretching from the lower edge of the platform towards the bottom edge of the canvas [9] With a newly invested omniscience, the spectator was thus enveloped in an artificial reality in which all boundaries delimiting the real

Fig. 1. Key to the panorama *The Battle of the Nile* showing Lord Nelson's defeat of the French, 1799. Picture courtesy: Guildhall Library Corporation of London.

Fig. 2. Cross-section of Robert Barker's panorama rotunda in London's Leicester Square, c. 1798, showing the upper and lower levels.

from the synthetic had been putatively eliminated; as art historian Lee Parry has noted, 'the viewer's eye was intended to be directly opposite the horizon line of the painting'. Left with nothing within which to locate the painting, the spectator was more likely to accept the illusionism of the visual field than if the painting had been conventionally framed or bounded (figure 3). Unlike the frame, which functions as a window onto an illusionistically-rendered space, the panorama attempted to create the sensation of the spectator's physical relocation into the centre of such a space. At the same time, as this illustration of a group of visitors on the viewing platform suggests, the mode of spectatorship invited by the panorama permitted a level of sociality quite distinct from the darkened auditorium of the nickelodeon theatre.

The methods by which these events were reassembled for the audience changed over time and even incorporated temporality as a design element. While early panoramas were based upon the idea of representing a single temporal and spatial situation (what a spectator would actually see were she situated at the centre of a scene on a hill or on top of a tall building – what I call 'naturalistic' panoramas), later panoramas, especially those concerned with depicting action, often constructed their scenes as 'composite' views, combining discrete incidents from an extended battle or other event into a 360-degree, apparently seamless visual field. There is thus a certain tension between the near perfect illusionism of the
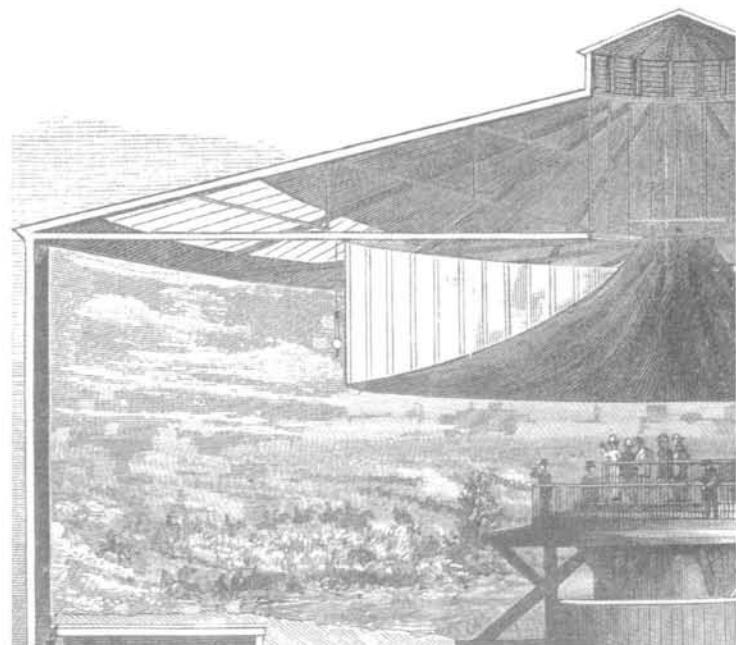
Fig. 3. Spectators standing on the viewing platform of Paul Philippoteaux's *The Battle of Gettysburg* panorama, 1884.

non-composite, 'naturalistic' 360-degree panorama and the edited composite view. While each of these styles is linked to cinema, they anticipate the 'cinematic' in quite distinct ways If the 'naturalistic' panorama remained faithful to Barker's initial idea of circular 'panoramic vision' in its evocation of cinema's spatial illusionism, the composite panorama mimicked the multi-perspectivalism, narrativism and selection of detail associated with the multishot filmmaking of the early cinema period.

Both modes of panoramic painting – those premissed upon a faithful imitation of a single 360-degree view and those synthesizing events separated in time and space – typically were accompanied by pull-out orientation maps helping observers to identify specific points of interest via numbered items (figure 4) The presence of a lecturer was usual at moving panorama exhibitions and occasionally a feature at circular panoramas In this regard, such orientation guides functioned like the intertitles and sequential tableaux one might find in early cinema reenactments. These orientation maps appeared on the inside covers of panorama booklets on sale at the exhibition site; the roughly eight-by-sixteen-inch folded orientation map could be pulled out for closer inspection of the enumerated points of interest, with the first item routinely appearing in the top left-hand corner (the panorama was always represented as two equal halves, one on top of the other). Reading the orientation map from left to right, spectators could find out more about each feature by turning the pages of the booklet to the section elaborating upon most, if not all, of the numbered items.[10] Organizing the 'views' as a series of attractions that should be seen in a specific order oriented or codified the ostensibly autonomous vision of the spectator by compiling a sequentiality akin to viewing edited images in a film

An offshoot of the circular panorama was the moving panorama, in which a single continuous canvas between eight and twelve feet high and up to a thousand or more feet in length was guided between two rollers before the viewer[11] The canvas was framed by a proscenium arch which varied in scale depending on the size of the painting Originating in the UK as a theatrical attraction in itself, or a feature of staged pantomimes in which background scenery would move to signify travel, the moving panorama was especially popular in the USA after 1846, when amateur scene painter John Banvard painted his giant panorama of the Mississippi River, which was claimed, in hyperbolic US style, to be three miles long.[12] Condensing days of actual travel time into an exhibition–performance of a few hours (Banvard's journey would then have taken at least four days by steamboat to complete), moving panorama paintings were either exhibited as one apparently continuous image, such as the banks of a river with occasional detours to river towns or scenes of Native American life, or as a series of separate scenes or

10 Some items did not receive further explication, although there does not seem to be a particular rule for determining which numbers are written about and which ignored

11 Kevin J Avery, 'Movies for manifest destiny the moving panorama phenomenon in America' in The Grand Moving Panorama of Pilgrim s Progress exhibit catalogue organized by The Montclair Art Museum, 1999 p 1 As Wolfgang Born has noted the rollers necessary for panorama exhibition anticipate the reels used in motion picture exhibition Born The panoramic landscape as an American art form Art in America vol 1 (January 1948) p 3

12 The first panorama to be shown in America was English artist William Winstanley s painting of Westminster and London in 1795, according to Lee Parry, it may have been copied from engravings by Robert Barker Parry 'Landscape theater in America p 54

Fig. 4. Explanation of *A View of Cabul, the Capital of Afghanistan* panorama, 1842.

'frames', each displayed in the proscenium opening. River panoramas claimed less to represent the entire length of a river from start to finish than to highlight the most picturesque aspects of the journey, which for Banvard usually meant representing Native American life. Selecting the highlights of the journey for visual representation on the canvas is akin in many ways to decoupage, where the filmmaker reassembles reality from temporally and spatially distinct scenes. Closer to theatrical scene paintings (they were painted in distemper, a painting process used to create backdrops in which the pigments are mixed with an egg yolk emulsion) than to highbrow examples of fine art, their vast size necessitated broad brush strokes from which the spectator would have received impressions rather than detail of the images represented on the canvas. Each of these frames contained a different scene or aspect of the route, which the lecturer would discuss as it was scrolled along the viewing frame; in the words of a contemporaneous London reviewer in *The Times*. 'drawn along on two cylinders, a small portion [of the panorama was] exhibited at a time, so that the audience may imagine they are performing the journey along the river, especially as the illusion is heightened by diorama effects representing changes of the day'.[13]

As a perceptual apparatus for framing human vision, both the 360-degree and moving panoramas were frequently promoted with an appeal to the notion of the reenactment as a way of foregrounding the uncanny mimetic prowess of the technology. Audiences, it was felt, would fully appreciate the illusionistic effect of the panorama only if its subject matter were ontologically linked to ideas of grandness and monumentality, in other words, the locations and events painted by panoramists had to resonate as suitable subjects for this epic mode of representation: 'big subjects for big pictures'. As avid consumers of both 360-degree and moving panoramas in the nineteenth century, when panoramas went in and out of fashion in both the USA and Europe, audiences familiarized themselves with the viewing protocols of a mass medium that would share many textual and formal similarities with cinema.[14] By closely examining how battle and river panoramas were promoted both as uncannily mimetic views and staged public performances, we are able to understand better how early film audiences made sense of filmic reenactments and to offer a more historically-nuanced account of the links between precinematic visual culture and motion pictures. This essay considers the two most common types of panorama from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[15] The first is the battle panorama. an exemplary instance of the reenactment model of panorama viewing, the second is the river panorama, an example of what I call the 'sublime vista' panorama. which offered spectators a form of 'enriched vision' and an opportunity for virtual travel. The essay concludes by briefly exploring how the theme of death serves

13 'Mr Banvard s moving panorama, *The Times*, nd , np in John Banvard and family papers, Minnesota Historical Society microfilm M360, hereafter BFP

14 Oettermann, *The Panorama* p 7

15 A third genre, not discussed here, is the illustrated sermon panorama depicting religious scenes exemplified by the famous moving panorama of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1850–51) Since this subgenre of panorama painting makes claims to verisimilitude in different ways to battle and river panoramas it will not be covered in this essay For more on the *Pilgrim s Progress Panorama* see the *The Grand Moving Panorama of Pilgrim s Progress* exhibition catalogue The exhibit was installed at the Montclair Art Museum from 31 January to 2 May 1999, before touring to the Portland Museum of Art (Maine) and The Edwin A Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University

as a unifying discourse in panoramas and cinematic reenactments, regarding not only their iconographies but coming to constitute their very ontologies

Nineteenth-century battle panoramas: revisioning the past

One of the most popular genres of both circular and moving panoramas was the battle subject As Dutch historian Yvonne van Eekelen has argued, 'battle panoramas held an enormous appeal for the man in the street who liked to imagine himself being pitched into battle, crossing unexplored territories or stepping back into biblical times'.[16] Yet the popularity of war as a panorama subject is not without irony, since of all the subjects available to panoramists, the battle seemed in some ways the least amenable to pictorial representation, given the abundance of action, as Evelyn J Fruitema and Paul A Zoetmulder have noted, 'the battlefield shows a tangle of moving soldiers and horses, whereas the immobility of "moving" objects on the canvas disturbs the optical illusion'.[17] Two main types of battle panorama existed in the nineteenth century. illustrated newspaper panoramas, which depicted major news stories of the day and were exhibited mostly in purpose-built rotundas in European capitals, and national memorial panoramas, which were discursively constructed as commemorative paintings celebrating victories that may have occurred many years previously According to Richard Altick, the democratizing conventions of panorama exhibition played a major role in the rise of battle panoramas. In contrast to private galleries of the time, anyone who could afford to pay the entrance fee and looked respectable could view the painting While still retaining some public appeal, mythical, allegorical and biblical subjects in the UK gave way to the depiction of major political and military events, such as the burning of the Houses of Parliament (which painter Charles Marshall constructed in one week),[18] the Coronation of King George IV,[19] and the Battles of Waterloo, Sedan, Trafalgar and Champigny-Villiers.[20]

Illustrated newspaper panoramas often appeared very soon after news of a major battle had reached British shores (though the battle itself may have taken place months before the news finally reached London); in 1801, English panoramist Robert Ker Porter painted the 270-degree *The Storming of Seringapatam* in a remarkable six weeks after reports of the battle reached Britain, in order to exploit topical interest in the event.[21] While it is unclear which sources Porter used in representing the event in paint – most likely a combination of newspaper accounts, etchings and verbal descriptions – he shared the arduous job of completing the scene with his fourteen-year old apprentice William Mulready, whose job it was to paint the approximately seven hundred soldiers depicted in the panorama Even

16 Yvonne van Eekelen The magical panorama in *The Magical Panorama the Mesdag Panorama, an Experience in Space and Time* trans Arnold and Erica Pomerans (Zwolle/The Hague Waanders Uitgevers/BV Panorama Mesdag, 1996) p 11
17 Fruitema and Zoetmulder *The Panorama Phenomenon*, p 33

18 Oettermann, *The Panorama*, p 176
19 This panorama was Henry Aston Barker s biggest success grossing £10,000 Altick *The Shows of London* p 177
20 Oettermann *The Panorama* p 32

21 Porter used panorama inventor Robert Barker s term *coup d'oeil* to describe his painting, rather than 'panorama', either because he wanted to differentiate his establishment from Barker s Leicester Square Panorama or because his paintings were never a full 360 degrees Ibid, p 115

22 According to Oettermann, John Thomas Serres's panorama called *The Pandemonium of Boulogne* is the most compelling example of nineteenth-century amusements foreshadowing contemporary television journalism, providing as up-to-date visual information as possible on the current military situation' Ibid p 125

23 *Journal London und Paris,* vol 7 (1801), pp 105–6 cited in Oettermann, *The Panorama* p 115

though news of the British victory in Southern India had taken months to reach England. Porter reacted swiftly with a panorama that might have had the same impact as satellite-delivered television news in its ability to virtually transport spectators to the battle front through a heightened sense of realism [22] Reporting on the phenomenal popular success of the painting, the German magazine *London und Paris* stated that: 'Those people were few in number who did not go several times to the Lyceum in the Strand to see the renowned painting of an unforgettable occurrence, for in addition to seeing accurate portraits of the main participants, almost all visitors were stirred by the sight of events on the subcontinent'.[23] Achieving overnight fame with *The Storming of Seringapatam*, Porter attempted to repeat the success with other battle subjects and garnered a reputation as a painter of British military victories. Porter's second panorama, *The Siege of Acre,* painted in 1801, documented another recent British battle, Sir Sidney Smith's liberation of the British troops and their allies from Napolean's army in Egypt. Explicitly signalling the status of this panorama as a reenactment or a kind of proto-newsreel, one reporter noted that

> To the extent that it is possible to re-create events on canvas, this picture succeeds in the opinion of knowledgeable visitors. .   Go to the Lyceum at any time of day, and you will always find people there. Many go back to see the picture two and three times. The political importance of the event depicted, the variety of the scene, the enthusiasm with which the artist has painted it, and the great resemblance of the portraits to the participants in the battle have awakened an extraordinary amount of interest in the exhibit.[24]

24 Ibid pp 103 113 cited in Oettermann, *The Panorama* p 117

Another example of the panorama-as-illustrated-newspaper or proto-newsreel can be seen in R. Dodd's 1805 panorama, *View of Gibraltar and Bay,* which was exhibited at the Panorama in Leicester Square. The booklet accompanying this panorama included an anamorphotic drawing (see figure 1) in which sketches of the images seen on the painting were reproduced and numbered for further explication. Highlighting such notable events as the 'Burning of His Majesty's Ships' and 'Escape of the Grand Fleet from the Flames', the public was reminded that this panorama was 'not so much in commemoration of that unfortunate event' but a demonstration of the 'alacrity of the British seamen . . [in] sending their boats to the relief of the distressed. and saving nearly the whole of the ship's company' [25] That panoramas such as these should have looked to the day's headlines for artistic inspiration should come as no surprise; there clearly would have been built-in public interest in having this military news from overseas dramatically visualized for patriotic citizens back home Such nationalistic scenes also furthered the interests of the State. helping to secure public support for British naval operations and imperial adventures

25 Guide for *View of Gibraltar* 1805, British Library

26 See Oettermann s discussion of
this in *The Panorama*
pp 106–26

27 Anon , 'The panorama with
memoirs of its inventor Robert
Barker and his son, the late
Henry Astor Barker *The Art-
Journal* vol 9 (1847), pp 46–7
Conflicts with Napoleon had
been successfully represented in
panoramic form, including *The
Battle of the Nile* (1798) and
The Battle of Trafalgar (1805)
Herbert C Andes, 'The Leicester
Square and Strand panoramas'
Notes and Queries, vol 159,
nos 4–5 (26 July 1930) p 59
Napoleon, too, was struck by
the panorama s potential for
propaganda, although as Parry
notes, his plan to construct
eight rotundas to display the
great battle of the Revolution
and Empire was defeated by
the events of 1812–15 Parry,
'Landscape theater p 54

28 Evelyn Onnes-Fruitema Of
panoramas old and new , in *The
Magical Panorama* p 31 For
example The modern *Battle of
Al-Qadissiyah* panorama in Iraq
depicts a battle that took place
in AD 637 reaching the viewing
platform either by stairs or
elevator, the spectator is
encircled by combat By way of
heightening the spectacle and
illusionism, recorded sound
effects of the war play
continuously in the background

29 John Banvard, *Descriptions of
Banvard s Geographical Painting
of the Mississippi River
Extensively Known as the* Three
Mile Picture, *with New
Additions of the Naval and
Military Operations on that
River Exhibiting a View of the
Country 1,500 Miles in Length
from the Mouth of the Missouri
to the Balize* (New York L H
Bigelow 1862)

30 Marie L Schmitz, Henry Lewis
panorama maker *Cultural
Heritage Quarterly Journal of
the Missouri Historical Society*
vol 3 (Winter 1982) p 41

Audiences attending the typical nineteenth-century battle panorama would not only have been entertained by the spectacular painting but would have been interpellated into the roles of historical witnesses or war reporters The ability to re-experience an event of enormous national significance, to step inside history, which was metaphorically enacted via the spectators' physical location and locomotion around the central viewing platform, were doubtless intended to trigger feelings of nationalistic fervour for early nineteenth-century spectators As Stephan Oettermann points out, Porter played a major role in popularizing the battle panorama and achieved recognition for his ability to transform major military events of the day into dramatic pictorial reenactments.[26] The propagandistic function of Porter's panoramas cannot be underestimated: displayed in the commercial and political centre of the world's foremost colonial power, the panoramas of military victory and colonial reign served to enhance public support for empire by their transformation of war into visual spectacle. Lord Nelson said he was indebted to panoramist Robert Barker for 'keeping up the fame of his victory in the battle of the Nile for a year longer than it would have lasted in the public estimation', indeed, the *Panorama of Waterloo* was so successful that Barker was able to retire from panorama painting and live off the profits that it generated.[27] This ideological role of the relatively rare contemporary panorama continues today, Evelyn Onnes-Fruitema notes that eight of the ten panoramas constructed since 1960 portray patriotic national battles[28]

Further evidence of the illustrative newspaper function of panoramas can be seen in the case of Banvard's Mississippi painting, which I discuss further below. As John Hanner has pointed out, the Civil War brought renewed interest in Banvard's Mississippi panorama, leading Banvard to substitute the Ohio and Missouri sections for 'new naval and military operations' on the Mississippi[29] Rival river panoramist Henry Lewis also used his panorama to respond to local events, adding a panel showing the great fire of St Louis, and, as we shall see below, Godfrey N. Frankenstein, painter of the Niagara Falls panorama, revised his moving panorama to reflect newsworthy events such as a fatal accident.[30] That Banvard had few qualms replacing river sections with current events suggests both the panorama exhibitor's need to draw new audiences (and entice back regulars) and the panorama's intermediary status as both art and illustrated newspaper The panorama exhibitor's reordering of sections of the painting also anticipates early cinema showmen rearranging the order of their films in an attempt to construct a narrative or to respond to topical events or the interests of a particular audience.

Panoramas, however, did more than simply anticipate early cinema's fascination with events drawn from the day's headlines, with local footage included in programmes when on tour in rural

locations, panoramas also constructed the experience in proto-cinematic ways, foreshadowing the shot structures of typical early travelogues and inviting the spectator to read the painting as a seamless synthesis of a place and its people The accompanying printed material for Burford's 1842 panorama, *View of the City of Cabul, Capital of Afghanistan*, for example, includes seventy-six points of interest (see figure 4). The painting's guide directs the spectator first to a distant view of the mountains of Kaffiristan, Nejhau and Taghau, before moving to closer views of the indigenous people of the region (46–76 in the orientation map). Paragraph-long descriptions of each of the numbered images are contained in the booklet, along with information about the opening times and the admission fee of one shilling.

The decision to combine general topographical views with representations of specific noteworthy figures is vividly illustrated in Burford's *View of the Battle of Sobraon, with the Defeat of the Sikh Army of the Punjab* (also appearing at the Panorama in Leicester Square) (figure 5) In the panorama's orientation map (figure 6) the action is represented on two levels, although the painting itself would have been viewed as one continuous image. In both the map's top and bottom levels we see distant Sikh villages, along with British and Sikh cavalry and guns, we are also presented with a high-angle view of the British and Sikh artillery on the page immediately

DESCRIPTION

OF A VIEW OF

THE BATTLE OF

SOBRAON,

WITH THE

DEFEAT OF THE SIKH ARMY

OF THE

PUNJAB,

NOW EXHIBITING AT

THE PANORAMA, LEICESTER SQUARE.

PAINTED BY THE PROPRIETOR, ROBERT BURFORD,

ASSISTED BY H C SELOUS

LONDON
PRINTED BY GEO VICHOLS, EARLS COURT, LEICESTER SQUARE
1846

Fig 5 *A View of the Battle of Sobraon* panorama poster, 1846

Fig. 6. Explanation of *A View of the Battle of Sobraon*, 1846.

EXPLANATION of a View of the BATTLE of SOBRAON, with the DEFEAT of the SIKH ARMY, now exhibiting at the PANORAMA, LEICESTER SQUARE.

1. Outer Intrenchment of the Sikhs.
2. Part of Brigadier Major Cureton's Division.
3. Guns.
4. Earthwork.
5. General Sir H. Smith's Division.
6. A Chief.
7. Ghoolab Singh Koopts.

8. Sham Singh.
9. Herr Singh Tree.
10. Sirdar Lehna Singh.
11. Brigadier Campbell's Division.
12. Village of Bikkiwen.
13. Chole Sobraon.

14. Village of Killa.
15. Village of Jilleewila.
16. Major-General Gilbert's Division.
17. Sikh Guns.
18. Irregular Sikh Cavalry.
19. Roderawlla.

20. Sikh Infantry.
21. Lord Gough and Staff.
22. Prince Waldemar of Prussia.
23. Ghoorkas.
24. Asops.
25. 63rd and 59th Native Infantry.

26. Lord Hardinge.
27. General Dick.
28. Fifth Brigade.
29. Seventh Brigade, 10th and 53rd Regiment. Brigadier Stacey.
30. Sikhkan.
31. Sixth Brigade, Brigadier Wilkinson.

32. Lieutenant-Colonel White, C.B.
33. Sikh Village.
34. Third Dragoons.

35. British Artillery, Colonel Lane.
36. River Sutlej.

37. Sikh Battery and Encampment.
38. Ninth Lancers.

39. Fourth Bengal Light Cavalry.
40. Bridge across the Sutlej.

41. The Ford.
42. Flight of the Sikh Army.
43. British Artillery.

following. The events unfolding in the panorama seem to represent the battle as it played out in its entirety, the labelling of background features which are almost too small to discern on the map also gives the impression of lateral as well as horizontal action. Identifying important Sikh and British personages by name, the panorama offers a narratively complex, even chaotic, representation of the battle, with Sikh and British artillery forces conjoined in episodes of conflict along both horizontal and lateral planes. While the panorama's brochure identifies scores of specific features in numbered sequence, the numbered items do not appear to follow any logic beyond their spatial arrangement on the canvas. For those spectators who had purchased an orientation guide *before* (or even after) entering the panorama, identifying all the features on the painting would have been quite an onerous task (there are forty-three in total), although as a keepsake of the panorama visit the brochure itself was probably designed to be perused at home as much as serving as a visual aid during the actual viewing

This ordering and labelling of locales and personages within the battle panorama indicates that such panoramas were intended to be seen in a particular sequence rather than viewed haphazardly, a point that has significant bearing on this discussion of the panorama's proto-cinematic qualities. The pull-out orientation map of Robert Burford's *Description of a View of the City of Nanking, and the Surrounding Country*, which appeared at the Panorama in Leicester Square in 1845, serves both to orient the spectator to the general location and direct her/his gaze left-to-right (clockwise) across the painting. Without stretching the analogy too far, one might argue that the spatial and temporal sequencing indicated on the map is in some ways analogous to early travelogues' use of establishing landscape shots, followed by closer shots of architecture and metonymically rendered native peoples. In Burford's painting, after presenting the landscape and buildings, the artist moves on to represent numerous dignitaries such as The Chief (29 on the orientation), Chinese Gamblers (30), Nieu Kien, Governor of Nanking (33), and so on, until we finally arrive at the principal event, a meeting between 'Her Britannic Majesty', the commanders in chief of the army and navy, and the three Chinese imperial commissioners. While a cinematic rendition of these sights would have been marked by cuts indicating spatial and temporal ellipses, the panorama is marked by a similar textualization which must have made sense to audiences at the time. In other words, panorama audiences would have clearly realized that this painting was a composite view of Nanking, rather than a 360-degree view of an event taking place in a unified space and time. In case they were left in any doubt, a disclaimer published in the booklet acknowledged that 'no such meeting [had taken] place precisely on the spot represented'. Burford defended his composite strategy by arguing that the technique afforded 'an opportunity of

31 *Description of a View of the City of Nanking, and the Surrounding Country, Now Exhibiting at The Panorama Leicester Square,* brochure of panorama painted by Robert Burford, 1845 British Library

presenting portraits of the principal persons engaged in the negotiations, and, at the same time, a characteristic and lively picture of the costume and customs of this singular people   It has been introduced on a portion of the Panorama, not otherwise occupied by an object of particular moment.'[31] To imbue his panorama with life and topicality, Burford brought the spectator in for a closer view of Nanking life, identifying key personages by name with reportorial diligence

And yet the panorama's blending of the topographical with the anecdotal threatened to undermine the very laws of verisimilitude by which it was governed While Burford was sensitive to issues of historical realism underpinning the panorama, he nevertheless saw in the composite view the potential for greater audience engagement and interest, and, with this in mind, created what I would argue is a more cinematic depiction of life in Nanking and its environs. As the panorama form evolved, it prepared spectators for a more fragmented way of seeing the world, a more modern perception, that was influenced by illustrated newspapers and the public's interest in seeing the key players and places making history; as theatre historian Martin Meisel has argued, 'a temporal element might come into play through the discrete incorporation of successive phases in the scene, in spite of the presumption of synchrony'.[32] Constructing a composite rather than a geographically accurate 360-degree view, Burford rejected the panorama's foundational premiss, the idea of a circular view of a single location; but Burford must have considered this a reasonable trade-off, given that audiences would have enjoyed the panorama *experience*, even if what they were seeing did not propose a single continuous perspective

32 Martin Meisel, *Realizations Narrative Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton MA Princeton University Press 1983) p 61

A similar example of narrative and human interest deforming the spatial logic of the panorama can be seen in Burford's *Description of a View of Baden Baden* (1843), in which the second half of the painting represents a single scene, a view of the 'Hut of Sighs', a ceremony rich in ethnographic detail. Committing nearly half of the painting to a single event certainly anticipates the shot trajectory of countless early ethnographic films, where opening images of the surrounding topography give way to extended views of native peoples. Rather than representing an event grounded in a single time and place, this panorama rejected the mimetic obligation to the unified view and in so doing edged closer to the cinematic Of course, the date of these panoramas (1840s) suggests the changes within the form; facing competition from moving panoramas and dioramas, circular panorama painters may have felt compelled to introduce more narrative incident and dynamism into their work, since the medium had been around for over fifty years and audiences might be expecting more than a single hyperrealist view for their money Yet again we see a situation that mirrors the transition from early static views in early cinema to multishot films Despite the

33 Flier for Waterloo panorama
    playing at the Westminster
    Panorama nd Regent Street
    Theatres scrapbook,
    Westminster Panorama file
    Guildhall Library Corporation of
    London hereafter GLCL
    Emphasis mine
34 Peter Paret, *Imagined Battles
    Reflections of War in European
    Art* (Chapel Hill NC University
    of North Carolina Press, 1997),
    p 68

35 Flier for the Rotunda Great
    Surrey St and Blackfriars
    Bridge Regent Street Theatres
    scrapbook GLCL

36 *Mr Charles Marshall s Great
    Moving Diorama Illustrating the
    Grand Route of a Tour Through
    Europe*

37 Van Eekelen The magical'
    p 16

inescapable stasis enveloping these scenes, reviewers nevertheless often pointed to the representation of 'action' as a benchmark of quality panorama painting, as suggested in this review of a panorama of the Battle of Waterloo from the London *Globe*. 'Few spectators can stand on the Central Platform and look out, without occasionally fancying themselves spectators of a *real action*.[33]

Anecdotal battle scenes thus assumed a metonymic relationship to the battle as a whole, with the common soldier and a heightened attention to realist detail assuming greater significance, as art historian Peter Paret notes, 'changes in warfare, changes in aesthetic theory and taste, the new importance of the common soldier, all affected and gradually altered the character of battle paintings'.[34] A more metonymic representation of the events of the battle was called for, and the solution was either to paint a segment that would stand in for the whole, or to synthesize important events taking place in the battle into a composite view. Moving panoramas had fewer problems condensing events into a continuous sequence, given their linear structure For example, a 'peristrephic or moving diorama' that played at the Rotunda in Great Surrey Street, London represented 'all the Great Events that have occurred during the Greek War' (books providing a history of the war were on sale for 6d and music began playing fifteen minutes before the start of each exhibition),[35] whereas in *Mr Charles Marshall's Great Moving Diorama Illustrating the Grand Route of a Tour Through Europe* that appeared at Her Majesty's Concert Room, audience members were informed that the purpose of the diorama was to 'reproduce in a series of pictures . . the most striking and memorable scenes which are thus so frequently visited and well known'.[36]

The viewing platform was an important element in the hyperrealism of the nineteenth-century panorama; the journey from the darkness of the corridor and staircase that led up to the brightly lit belvedere signalled the start of a perceptual shift in which spectators measured the success of a painting against a set of preconceived ideas (whether or not they had ever witnessed the depicted scene in real life or had seen representations of it) While contemporaneous reports of the experience of spectators looking across the vast painting are obviously difficult to generalize upon, van Eekelen argues that for some spectators, the illusion may have become 'unbearable', forcing them to leave the painting sooner than they had intended There are numerous accounts of nineteenth-century spectators becoming faint or dizzy when looking at a panorama – a foreshadowing of apocryphal accounts of spectators ducking in their seats at the sight of an oncoming train in the Lumières' *Arrival of a Train* (1895) – even suffering from airsickness, as in the still extant *Panorama of Thun*.[37] Newspaper accounts went so far as to advise ladies of a nervous disposition to be on their guard when viewing panoramas lest the experience

become overwhelming, although men, too, were not immune from the effects of motion sickness, as seen in a cartoon entitled *Le Panorama du 'vengeur'* which shows what looks like a naval officer and other aristocratic dignitaries suffering from seasickness atop a viewing platform which resembled the deck of a ship (figure 7). If the gendered nature of panorama reception is suggested in these scraps of historical ephemera, it may be worth posing some more specific questions about gender, war and vision. For example, was the elevated point of view, the immensity of the canvas (the *Siege of Acre* was reportedly painted on three thousand square feet of canvas)[38] and the spectator's sense of mastery in surveying such a scene, experienced in the same way by both men and women? Would female spectators (and many men for that matter) with no first-hand experience of the battlefield have responded to the reenactment genre in the same way as male veterans? Would the

38 George Clinton Densmore Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, Volume II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927–49), p 239, cited in Oettermann, *The Panorama*, p 360, fn 53

LE PANORAMA DU "VENGEUR,,

Fig. 7. *Le Panorama de Vengeur* cartoon, c. 1880s.

epic and aesthetic qualities of the battle reenactment have resonated as much (or perhaps even more) for women viewers than men (if the above cartoon is anything to go by, men it would seem were suitable targets for parody)? Was the battle subject itself a male-oriented genre, or was the viewing platform a social space little marked by gender?

What is known about nineteenth-century panorama exhibition is that women and children made up a large part of the audience, especially during the working-week daytime when attendance was generally lower. Almost all the extant panorama promotions list a child's entrance fee, indicating that children accompanied by women – or possibly attending alone if older – were considered an important viewing constituency. There is also some evidence of women's perceptions of war, especially during the Crimean War of 1853–56 Women were not only central catalysts in ushering in new standards of medical hygiene and hospital management during this war (Florence Nightingale was pivotal in this respect), but they were also first-hand witnesses of some of its major battles, climbing up hillsides to obtain a bird's-eye view of the front line, direct correlatives, one might argue, of the elevated vision facilitated by the panorama.[39] And yet, for the most part, women have been denied first-hand experience of war, as Jean Gallagher has argued in her study of the construction of female visuality in the two World Wars. According to Gallagher, vision has always been one of the 'crucial elements that has traditionally marked the gendered division of war experience: men "see" battle; women, as non-combatants *par excellence*, do not'.[40] One cannot help but wonder, then, how women's status in war as 'non-participants' inflected their experience of the battle panoramas of the nineteenth century There is a suggestion that the presumed interests of female viewers were addressed by the subject matter of smaller panoramas that were occasionally exhibited in an upper rotunda in the same building (see figure 2). For example, perhaps as a way of catering to the differing tastes of male and female panorama-goers, Barker exhibited in the upper circle of the Panorama building (located directly above the Battle of the Nile panorama [see figure 1]) a much more innocuous painting, that of Margate, the then-fashionable seaside resort which had gained notoriety in the newspaper gossip columns[41] While suggesting a forerunner of the short film preceding the main feature, in the case of Barker's rotunda it is unclear whether audiences would have had a choice in viewing the smaller of the two panoramas first. Nevertheless, there is a striking contrast in the subject matter of the two paintings, suggesting that panorama impresarios were not only sophisticated promoters of their artistic wares (placing a more prosaic subject in the same building as an epic one may have heightened audience reaction to the more spectacular of the two paintings), but may also have been designed to accommodate the gendered

39 Paul Kerr et al , *The Crimean War* (London Boxtree Press 1998) For more on Nightingale, see pp 78–95 for women's first-hand accounts of the war see pp 61–2

40 Jean Gallagher *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (Carbondale, IL Southern Illinois University Press 1998) p 3 Gallagher argues that 'vision has functioned not only as a mark of and basis for authenticity and authority in writing [and imaging] about war but has played an important role in the developing and gendering of cultural discourses about war'

41 'Zweytes Panorama Seeansicht von Margate Blick auf die Stadt *Journal London und Paris* vol 4 (1799), pp 3–5 cited in Oettermann *The Panorama* p 107

composition of their audience. Panoramic paintings may have been held to different standards of social and moral propriety when it came to graphic imagery than other art forms such as the theatre; in other words, women and children may have had fewer qualms viewing battlefield carnage in a painting than they would have in less salubrious surroundings. Without making sweeping claims about panoramas and the female spectator, there is a surprising gendered dimension to the melodramatic structure of feeling shaping a great deal of writing about panoramas in the early nineteenth century. Submitting oneself to the *trompe l'oeil* effects, while not strictly gendered as an activity, nevertheless invites a cognitive dissonance that one might assume women would have negotiated with greater ease than men.

However, while genres of fantasy and escapism have been traditionally associated with women, panoramas invited men as well as women to submit themselves to the panorama's spell. At the same time, if this description of Robert Barker's 1799 recreation of *The Battle of the Nile*, depicting a decisive battle between Napoleon's French fleet and the Royal Navy under Admiral Nelson in Abukir Bay at the mouth of the Nile (see figure 1) is anything to go by, women may have had a harder time than men dealing with the graphic violence represented in some paintings

> As soon as you enter a shiver runs down your spine. The darkness of night is all around, illuminated only by burning ships and cannon fire, and all is so deceptively real .. that you imagine you can see far out to sea in one direction and the distant coastline in the other . . And if the whole scene is terrible, still it is the fate of the *Orient* that arouses the greatest horror: a ship with 120 guns . . filled with gunpowder and flammable material, with its entire crew on board. .. Perhaps no words can fully convey an impression of this inferno. . . . Clinging to the masts and yardarms in desperate contortions are the poor sailors; some have been torn to pieces and catapulted into the air by the explosion: heads, limbs, cannon mounts, yards, masts, muskets, crates, shreds of ropes and all the other contents of the ship rain down on all sides [42]

According to Paret, the shift from idealization towards topographical accuracy in easel paintings of battles of the early nineteenth century, meant that audiences were increasingly subjected to more realistic renderings of the events represented (Paret notes that, in portraits of both military heroes and mass combat, artists began to emphasize the human costs of war).[43] But while the death of a military hero was often seen as the perfect vehicle for nationalist fervour, verisimilitude alone could not produce the desired effect, as Benjamin West, who had painted *The Death of General Wolfe* in 1770, wrote. 'Wolfe must not die like a common soldier under a

42 'Modebelustigungen in London Neues Panorama Grausende Darstellung der Schlacht bei Abukir *Journal London und Paris* vol 3 (1799) pp 309–11 cited in Oettermann, *The Panorama*, p 107

43 Paret *Imagined Battles*, p 66

bush, neither should Nelson be represented dying in the gloomy hold of a ship, like a sick man in a Prison Hole'. According to West, 'to move the mind there should be spectacle represented to raise and warm the mind. . . . A mere *matter of fact* will never produce this effect'.[44]

That battle panoramas were perceived as distinctly family affairs in the USA can be gleaned from their admission rate policies (fifty cents for adults and twenty-five cents for children). French artist Paul Philippoteaux's *Panorama of the Battle of Gettysburg* (figure 8), an example of what I call the national memorial panorama, opened in a purpose-built building in Chicago in 1884.[45] Promoter Charles Wiloughby commissioned a second rotunda in Boston in 1884, and the panorama also appeared in Union Square, New York (figure 9) and can now be viewed in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.[46] Unlike his English counterpart Porter, who rushed to bring images of the Indian, Egyptian and Napoleonic wars to the panoramic canvases of London, Philippoteaux approached his subject manner in a more leisurely fashion, spending several months on the battlefield of Gettysburg making sketches, tracking down official military maps in Washington DC, and obtaining first-hand accounts of the battle from Generals Hancock, Doubleday and others.[47] Philippoteaux's panorama was a much larger undertaking than Porter's: instead of three thousand square feet, Philippoteaux's measured twenty thousand square feet, and in addition to daytime operation, the panorama was illuminated at night by hidden electric lamps.[48] The vast canvas depicts Pickett's Charge, the decisive action which took place on the afternoon of 3

44 From Helmut von Erffa and Allen Stanley. *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Hand/ London, 1986), p. 222 cited in Paret, *Imagined Battles*, p. 50 Emphasis mine

45 The duo-octagonal building housing the panorama cost $40,000 and was 134 feet in diameter and 96 feet high. The painting measured 400 feet in length and was 50 feet high

46 The panorama was restored in 1980–82. *The Battle of Atlanta*, another circular panorama, was painted by William Wehner and can be viewed in Atlanta. It too was restored at the same time as the Gettysburg panorama. For information on extant panoramas around the world, see Oettermann. *The Panorama*, pp. 345–7.

47 For a detailed discussion of the panorama's construction and special effects, see 'The Cyclorama'. *Scientific American*, vol. 55 (1886), p. 296

48 The panorama was open from 9 am to 11 pm each day. For more information, see ibid

Fig. 8. Inside cover of guidebook for *Panorama of the Battle of Gettysburg*. The National Panorama Company, Chicago, c. 1883.
Fig. 9. Poster for *The Battle of Gettysburg* appearing in Union Square, New York.

49 Philippoteaux, Panorama of the
    Battle of Gettysburg brochure
    New York Historical Society
    (hereafter NYHS) For a
    fascinating account of the
    construction of this panorama,
    see Theodore R Davis How a
    great battle panorama is made'
    St Nicholas (December 1886),
    pp 99-112
50 'The Cyclorama p 296

July 1863, the third day of the battle.[49] The death of Lieutenant
Cushing was represented in the foreground of the panorama, the
viewing platform located in the centre of the Union line.[50]

That this panorama was represented as a reenactment of the
Gettysburg battle is clear from descriptions in the accompanying
booklet and in press reaction to its original Chicago exhibition. A
review in the *Chicago Tribune* makes explicit reference to the
panorama's organization of the visual field as dynamic, as capable
of representing an event *as it happened* and along several visual
planes.

> The battleground, with its dead and wounded soldiers, the smoke
> of cannon, the bursting of shells, the blood stained ground are all
> drawn with a realism that is almost painful The spectator can
> almost imagine that he hears the rattle of musketry and the brave
> regiments as they charge upon each other to sink amid the smoke
> and carnage.   Standing on the little platform, the spectator
> seems to look out for miles upon a stretch of cornfields and farms
> .. [And yet] the countenance of some of the leading generals of
> both armies are veritable portraits, and the disposition of the
> contending regiments and the thrilling action of the great battle are
> reproduced as if by magic.[51]

51 Chicago Tribune 2 December
    1883 n p cited in brochure for
    the Panorama of the Battle of
    Gettysburg permanently located
    at the corner of Wabash
    Avenue and Hubbard Court,
    Chicago, c 1884 Painted by
    Paul Philippoteaux NYHS

Even more striking is the protocinematic nature of the composition
itself – with its visual grammar of long-shots of cornfields and
closeups of generals – which seems to prepare spectators for
cinema's later signifying practices Given that the painting could
never be regarded in exactly the same way as cinema – the
represented scenes were not viewed autonomously, and while the
guidebook accompanying the panorama encouraged spectators to
view the painting sequentially, this was by no means an iron-clad
requirement – it nevertheless gave spectators the impression of
different scenes from the action which had been seamlessly blended
into the painting's composition. Dominating the *trompe l'oeil* was the
faux terrain (under construction in figure 10), the horizontal space
between the canvas and the viewing platform which would be filled
with *attrapes* (hoax objects) appropriate to the subject matter of the
painting. *Faux terrains* were constructed by specially recruited
theatre designers who aimed to minimize the optical disjuncture
between three-dimensional foreground and two-dimensional painted
background, as seen in figure 11, an illustration of the *Battle of
Gettysburg* [52] For example, the illusionistic success of the *Battle of el
Kebir* panorama, displayed at the National Panorama in London in
1883, was largely attributed to its *faux terrain* According to the
critic of the *Daily Telegraph* 'the spectator is impressed by the
completeness of an illusion, sustained by a skillfully contrived
foreground, giving to a semblance of the horrors of war an aspect of
grim reality'.[53] In the case of Hendrik Willem Mesdag's 1881

52 The anti war Bourbaki Panorama
    painted by the Swiss artist
    Edouard Le Castre in 1871 has
    a most impressive faux terrain
    in which a real railway wagon
    merges almost imperceptibly
    with the painted rails on the
    canvas Fruitema and
    Zoetmulder The Panorama
    Phenomenon, p 65
53 'War in Egypt' National
    Panorama guidebook 1883,
    London Playbill Scrapbook
    GLCL p 142
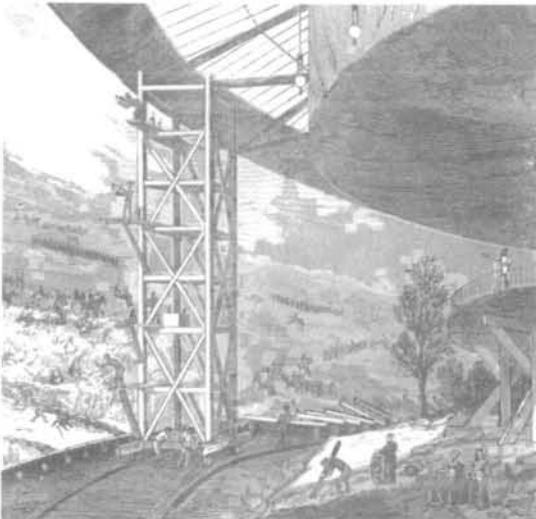
Fig. 10. Philippoteaux directing artists working on the *The Battle of Gettysburg.*

Fig. 11. Illustration of 3-D effect in Gettysburg panorama using wooden figures and props that merge with the painted canvas.

panorama of Scheveningen (figure 12), the heightened reality effect achieved by introducing three-dimensional foreground objects such as the sand dune, fishing baskets and tufts of wild grass, was reinforced by carefully framing the painting itself in such a way as to eliminate all signs of the presentational apparatus. As one author noted almost forty years before Mesdag painted his panorama:

[A]n attentive observer will see that everything is removed which can tend to break the spell, to dispel the illusion, under which the senses temporarily lie; we are not permitted to see the top of the

picture, nor the bottom of the picture, not the skylights; nor are any objects allowed to intervene between the spectator and the painted wall. We have therefore no standard with which to compare the picture, and thus it ceases to appear like a picture.[54]

In the case of Philippoteaux's Gettysburg panorama, the space between the viewing platform and the canvas was carefully arranged with earth, lumber, trees, fence rails, bushes, logs and camp equipment, merging with the colour tones and depicted scene of the painting in an attempt to create a unified visual field. A report on the panorama in *Scientific American* described how through the use of 'real trees ... shrubbery, portions of fences, and the like ... a genuine landscape is produced'.[55] The effect, one reviewer argued, taxed 'the ingenuity of the looker-on to tell where the real ends and where the work of the brush begins'.[56] The deception of scale was so convincing that some spectators were surprised to discover that the largest depicted human figures, which appeared life-size, were in fact between three and four feet in height.[57] Vouching for the credibility of the foreground props, the *Scientific American* critic points up the higher truth quotient afforded objects versus images – a tension that plays out with striking alacrity in the natural history museum. Yet the theatricalism associated with this scenography mitigates against its status as high art; to add real objects to art nudges the representation over the edge, turning it into crass illusionism in the minds of contemporaneous artists such as John Constable, who believed that the hyperrealist effects elevated deception above art. According to Constable, the panorama painter viewed 'nature minutely and *cunningly*, but with no greatness or breadth'.[58] While

54 'On cosmoramas, dioramas and panoramas', *The Penny Magazine*, vol 11 (1842), p 364

55 'The cyclorama', p 296

56 Ibid

57 Davis, 'How a great battle', p 112

58 R B Beckett (ed), *John Constable's Correspondence. Volume II. Early Friends and Maria Bicknell (Mrs Constable)* (Suffolk Records Society, vol VI 1964), p 34 For more on Constable's sentiments on dioramas see Alison Griffiths *Wondrous Difference: Cinema Anthropology and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p 19

the inclusion of three-dimensionality into the optical field of the Gettysburg panorama may have represented a distinction from cinema, audiences would have been thoroughly familiar with perceiving the American Civil War in three dimensions as a result of the huge numbers of stereoscopic slides produced of the event, especially since by 1870 stereoscopes were present in most middle-class family parlours [59]

Appreciating the symbolic monumentality of the Battle of Gettysburg was thus less of a challenge for audiences than deciphering the significance of the individual episodes which depicted highlights of the unfolding battle. As the preeminent US battle panorama, Philippoteaux's painting points up the reenactment's fundamental paradox; that notwithstanding how faithful a facsimile it claims to be, it can only ever produce a *rendition*, a version of the original that always runs the risk of slipping back into a fictional mode. As van Eekelen argues, 'no matter how convincing the spatial aspects of a panorama, or how irresistibly the horizon draws us toward infinite distances, we can never completely ignore the actual surface of the canvas, if only because all movement on it has been frozen' [60] As an absent presence that shared many formal features with cinema, the panorama thus oscillated between being lifelike and drained of life as a result of its stasis; its mimeticism was always undercut by spectators' foreknowledge of its gimmickry, what we might call the 'panorama effect'.

'Sublime triumphs of art': river panoramas as metaphorical reenactment[61]

The river comes to me instead of my going to the river [62]

Panorama exhibitors entertained their audiences in similar ways to itinerant motion picture travelogue lecturers of the late 1890s and early 1900s; like the typical presentations of panoramas, motion picture screenings were ephemeral events which often had lecturers present to contextualize the films and edit them together, provide commentary, and cue musical accompaniment. For example, announcements for two panoramas at the Great Globe in London's Leicester Square in 1857 (*A Panorama of St Petersburg and Moscow* and the *Coronation of the Czar*) make reference to explanatory lectures and appropriate music, and an undated programme for Hamilton's *New Overland Route to India* promises accompaniment by 'National Music and Descriptive Lecture' [63] An anonymous contributor to *All the Year Round* in 1867 wrote that 'it is a law that the canvas can *only* move to music', thus suggesting the theatricalized nature of some panorama exhibitions Noted American panoramist Banvard hired both composers and performers to create musical accompaniment for his Mississippi panorama (Banvard

59 R M Hayes, *3-D Movies a History and Filmography of Stereoscopic Cinema* (Jefferson NC MacFarland & Co, 1998), p 1

60 Yvonne van Eekelen The magical panorama, in *The Magical Panorama* p 16 For a discussion of the spectator s negotiation of the interaction between the represented image and the painted surface of the canvas see Richard Wolheim 'What the spectator sees in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds) *Visual Theory Painting and Interpretation* (New York HarperCollins, 1991) pp 101–50

61 The quote sublime triumphs of art' is from 'On cosmoramas' p 363

62 Henry Longfellow *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence* Volume II (Boston, MA Ticknor and Co 1886) pp 67–8 cited in Hanner The adventures' p 68 Longfellow went to see Banvard s panorama on 16 December 1846 and wrote that One seems to be sailing down the great stream and sees boats, sandbars and the cottonwoods in the moonlight Three miles of canvas of great merit' Longfellow quoted in Estelle V Newman 'The story of Banvard s folly' *Long Island Forum* vol 15 no 5 (May 1952) pp 83–4 95–7 in BFP

63 Leicester Square Panorama clipping file and 'London Playbills Scrapbook p 52 both housed at GLCL

64 Information found in John
Hanner 'The adventures of an
artist John Banvard
1815–1891' PhD dissertation
Michigan State University, 1979,
p 60

65 Ibid, p 61 Newspaper
clippings from the Banvard
scrapbook describe his lecture
as containing 'racy anecdotes'
and 'short pithy remarks'

eventually married pianist Elizabeth Goodnow after she was hired to play waltzes during the performance).[64] Entering a darkened auditorium, the audience would find their seats while incidental music played. At eight o'clock the curtain would rise to reveal the first scene of the painting, illuminated by footlights; standing at its side was Banvard, who, using a long pointer, would direct the audience's attention to scenes passing by on the moving canvas (figure 13).[65] According to Hanner, it was Banvard's showmanship over and above his knowledge of the geographical, social and

Fig. 13. Banvard exhibiting his Mississippi panorama before Queen Victoria in 1852.

66   Ibid p 62

67   Unidentified clipping from the
      North of Scotland Gazette
      featured in a flier advertising
      Banvard's panorama at the City
      Hall Perth, Australia, 1852,
      Banvard s panorama of the
      Mississippi River unidentified
      clipping in BFP

68   By the mid 1850s, there were
      at least seven river panoramas
      on tour in the USA a clear
      indicator of their popularity Lisa
      Lions, Panorama of the
      monumental grandeur of the
      Mississippi Valley Design
      Quarterly (July 1977), p 32
      Only one of these panoramas is
      extant the Dickeson-Egan
      Panorama of the Monumental
      Grandeur of the Mississippi
      Valley Rather than a continuous
      portrait of the river, the
      panorama as Lions points out
      is a collection of 'vignettes
      depict[ing] dramatic, idealized
      river views and quasi-historical
      events Dickeson's panorama
      consisted of twenty-five pictures
      of the Mississippi from the mid
      sixteenth century to the mid
      nineteenth century

69   Reveille, St Louis 29 October
      1848 n p, cited in Joseph Earl
      Arrington The story of
      Stockwell's panorama
      Minnesota History, vol 33 no
      7 (1953) p 286

70   Review of Banvard s panorama
      Bristol Gazette n d cited in
      McDermott The Lost
      Panoramas p 14

71   Between 1830 and 1842, the
      following places and subjects
      were represented in panoramic
      form at the Panorama Leicester
      Square Rome Damascus Acre
      Lima Jerusalem Bombay,
      Stirling the Siege of Antwerp
      the Cemetery of Père la Chaise
      at Paris the Arctic Region of
      Boothia and so on Information
      from On cosmoramas, p 364

scientific aspects of the Mississippi delta that was the biggest draw with audiences (Banvard apparently told a much-embellished story of riverboat pirates who terrorized the West, even though this gang had disbanded before he painted the panorama).[66] A critic for the *North of Scotland Gazette* remarked that Banvard proved 'a very pleasant companion in this long voyage', introducing 'some sly jokes .. in true Yankee style', while another concluded that 'in short, Mr Banvard is a considerable part of the exhibition itself, but without the least varnish or paint'.[67]

As one of the most popular genres of panoramas in the early to mid nineteenth century, the river panorama differed considerably in presentational style from the 360-degree panorama [68] In order to hold the interest of audiences and 'relieve the monotony of the long, continuous river banks', in the words of panorama historian Joseph Earl Arrington, river panoramists often included scenes of vessels, Native American life and, in the case of John Stockwell, views of the river 'under various aspects, by moonlight, at sunrise, during storms, and in fogs, and with the most picturesque effects'.[69] While the spectator of the circular panorama would be quite literally surrounded by the painting, viewers of the moving panorama sat before an ambulatory painting in reception conditions that strongly resembled cinemagoing.

Described by art historian Wolfgang Born as a 'pictorial epic', the river panorama's most distinctive feature was its movement, which gave audiences the sensation of viewing a constantly shifting landscape; in the words of one critic, 'you flit by a rice swamp, catch a glimpse of a jungle, dwell for an instant on a prairie, and are lost in admiration at the varied dress, in which, in the Western world, Nature delights to attire herself'.[70] Like panoramas of antiquities or modern cities such as London or Paris, panoramas of landscape or natural wonders such as gigantic rivers solicited a specific mode of spectating in which viewers abandoned the spatial and temporal coordinates of the outside world and, for the duration of the exhibition, entered into an implied contract with the artist for the price of admission, spectators would be metaphorically transported to the scene of the painting and become enraptured with its inalienable lifelike quality [71] This contract required that the panorama be seen not necessarily in the same way as a traditional painting or even theatre, but as a *trompe l'oeil* effect that gained in illusionism what it may have lost in attention to artistic detail (according to contemporaneous reviews, the paintings shared more in common with scenic backdrops than traditional landscape painting – hardly surprising given its length). The problem of vision in painting, the creation of perspective and delimitation of a view, had received a great deal of attention in the context of landscape painting since 1800, the landscape sketch becoming in art critic Peter Galassi's words 'a ready vehicle for experiments in realism' The interest

72 Miller The panorama', p 43

73 According to John Francis
McDermott five panoramas of
the Mississippi were painted in
the 1840s alone, the shortest
being 425 yards long
McDermott Gold rush movies',
California Historical Society
vol 33 no 1 p 29

74 *The Examiner,* 16 December
1848 n p, cited in Altick, *The
Shows of London* p 327
Interestingly, the same article is
published as The American
panorama' in *Littel's Living Age*
the following year, vol 20
(January-March 1849) p 314
this time authored by an E
Little

75 That Banvard s panorama
became the subject of satirical
attack in famous humorist
Artemus Ward s Mississippi-
style panorama that opened at
Dodworth Hall in New York City
in October 1861 is a clear
indication of Banvard s national
reputation as a panorama
exhibitor Ward's lecture
parodied all the cliched
panorama conventions including
Ward s brandishing of a
dilapidated umbrella instead of
a pointer as Curtis Dahl notes
[Ward] used and abused all the
customary tricks submitting his
audience in turn to fictitious
autobiographical allusions, teary
sentiment blatant flag-waving
and mournful pathos' Dahl
Atriums Ward comic
panoramist', *The New England
Quarterly,* vol 32, no 4 (1959)
p 483

generated by the landscape sketch (particularly in oil) around the turn of the eighteenth century undoubtedly played a key role in the emergence of panorama painting as a pictorial convention that, like landscape painting, lacked the status of 'high art' but nevertheless drew attention because of its hyperrealism. This argument, of course, has a familiar ring to it, since it was also made in relation to photography As art historian Angela Miller argues, 'The advancing frontier of illusionistic representation in the nineteenth century provoked concern over the very definition of art and the panorama's contested claims to artistic status, doing so in a manner that anticipates a century of debate over the artistic value of photography, then film, video, and electronic media'.[72] While space precludes detailed analysis of the impact of photography upon panoramas, suffice to say that the panoramic form inspired a number of late nineteenth-century photographers to shoot 360-degree views of cities, and, following in the footsteps of Banvard and his river panorama cohorts, to photograph river banks in their entirety

Writing about one of the most famous river panoramas of the nineteenth century,[73] Banvard's immense 1848 moving panorama of the Mississippi, Charles Dickens began his review with some important disclaimers about what a panorama was *not* 'It is not a refined work of art . it is not remarkable for accuracy of drawing, or for brilliancy of colour, or for subtle effects of hues and shade'. If the panorama failed to meet the standards of high art, it was nevertheless for Dickens a 'picture irresistibly impressing the spectator with a conviction of its plain and simple truthfulness . It is an easy means of traveling day and night, without any inconveniences from climate, steamboat company, or fatigue, from New Orleans to the Yellow Stone Bluffs '[74] As in the case of the Windsor exhibition, spectators remained seated as the 1,320-foot painting (an equivalent of 15,840 square feet, not the three miles claimed by promoters) gradually unfurled between rollers over approximately two hours, while listening to Banvard's commentary and music provided by piano and seraphine.[75]

The conceit of armchair travel evoked by Dickens was only one of the ways in which the panorama anticipated the textual forms and critical discourses of the early travelogue film. Striking in the nineteenth-century literature on panoramas is the claim that the panorama could metaphorically reenact the *original* journey experienced by the painter, not merely represent an uncanny likeness of a specific landscape. The river journey offered its audience an infinitely repeatable *exemplary* journey taken by the artist; as spectators retraced Banvard's travels (up or down the river, depending on the direction the painting had been scrolled during the previous performance), they were invited to assume *his* subject position and reenact *his* primary experience of the Mississippi The corroborating value of (the) reenactment thus resides in the

audience's foreknowledge that Banvard did in fact navigate his boat up and down the Mississippi; the very act of retracing Banvard's voyage thus lends it weight as an experience, even authorizes it as an event with sufficient national significance to warrant being reenacted in the first place. The yoking of the experiential to the performative – the fact that one is invited to both step into Banvard's shoes for the duration of the exhibition *and* to appreciate his showmanship – is a constituent feature of the reenactment As texts that frequently signal their authored status in overt and self-conscious ways, so as not to deceive audiences (like the television news and crime shows which signal the constructed nature of the footage with the cautionary title 'reconstruction'), reenactments are highly reflexive speech acts. Moreover, by drawing attention to the very idea of an action or journey as a reprise of the 'original', Banvard's performance seems to anticipate the internal logic of the early cinema travelogue, especially Hale's Tours's patented 'Pleasure Railway', with its blurring of the signifying practices of the amusement park ride and travelogue. As distant cousins of the 'high-class' film lectures given by Burton E. Holmes, Lyman H. Howe and Frederick Monsen, moving panoramas merged 'high' and 'low' amusements and created the conditions that made possible the explosion in travel cinema in the early 1900s Whether or not the success of Banvard's panorama was more or less dependent on the novelty of the panoramic apparatus as opposed to his evocation of a simulated journey on the world's longest river is difficult to determine. It also becomes something of a moot point when we consider how phenomenally successful Banvard's panorama was with mid nineteenth-century audiences Banvard exhibited his panorama to over 400,000 people in the USA alone, and over the course of several years earned at least $200,000 on tours to Europe and at a command performance before Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle in 1848.[76] Promoted as 'by far the largest picture ever painted by man', Banvard's panorama was conceived as a 'gigantic idea' that would reflect something of the vast scale of the 'prodigious river [that] is superior to the streamlets of Europe'.[77] Just as the 360-degree British panorama made famous by Robert Barker served nationalist interests, so too did the moving panorama According to Miller, 'it did not merely allow space to be imaginatively inhabited, it also put this space in the service of a specific historical ideology Visual appropriation was a step toward the conceptual control which accompanied the extension of America's and Europe's emerging urban-industrial order over increasingly wide areas of human experience.'[78]

However, it would be misleading to imply that *all* moving panoramas were viewed in the same way as Banvard's Spin-offs of 360-degree and moving panoramas, such as the Mareorama, located on the *Champ de Mars* at the 1900 Paris Exposition, a hyperrealist

76 Banvard s panorama was enormously popular for two years in the USA following its initial exhibition it toured New Orleans Boston, New York and Washington DC For more on Banvard see McDermott *Panoramas of the Mississippi* John Hanna 'The adventures' and BFP

77 *Description of Banvard s Panorama of the Mississippi River Painted on Three Miles of Canvas Exhibiting a View 1 200 Miles in Length Extending from the Missouri River to the City of New Orleans* (Boston MA John Putnam 1847) p 7 This is a useful primary resource for information on the construction of panoramas it also contains a detailed description of the views represented along the length of the painting

78 Miller The panorama' p 47

79 'The Mareorama at the Paris Exposition', *Scientific American*, vol 83 (1900), p. 200

spectacle conjoining illusionist stage effects with theatrical narrative, was organized around a slightly different idea of virtual travel. Standing on the decks of an enormous steamer that employed the Cardan suspension system gave visitors the sensation of a rolling and pitching motion, the Mareorama was less a reenactment of a singular journey than a commodified touristic *experience*.[79] Premissed upon a similar idea of a virtual cruise, *'Chas. W. Poole's Myrioramic Realizations'* (figure 14) and *'New Myrioramic Route Cairo to the Cape'* (figure 15) were explicitly organized around the idea of undertaking a journey for the first time *yourself* (metaphorically of course) rather than reenacting a journey from the (celebrated) point of view of an artist.[80] As discussed above, most panoramas were accompanied by booklets which contained pull-out maps identifying the panorama's topographic points of interest. Combining a general introduction to the artist and subject with a legend which detailed each of the identified locales, these booklets, a cross between a conventional map and a tourist guidebook, often represent the best surviving records of the nineteenth-century panorama.

80 Established in 1837, Messrs Poole Brothers were successors to Messrs Poole and Young and the celebrated M Gompertz (self-styled Father of the Panorama who claimed to be the 'oldest established and greatest panorama and dioramic proprietors in the world') According to the publicity brochure, the company owned six panoramas and kept them up to date by adding new features such as motion pictures 'In the present go-ahead times each entertainment to be successful must beat its predecessor, and in submitting the present Myriorama, painted by the very best obtainable artists, regardless of cost, and bringing his great practical knowledge to bear upon the Machinery and effects, and selecting a first-class Variety Company, Mr Chas. W. Poole has no hesitation stating that anything compare[d] with this Entertainment has never been produced in this or any other country' Publicity brochure on panorama file Theater Collection New York Public Library

81 Moving dioramic experiences', *All the Year Round*, vol 17 (23 March 1867), p. 304

For many critics, panoramas combined just the right amount of stolid respectability with popular amusement; one critic writing in 1867 called the art form 'a demesne that seems to be strictly preserved for the virtuous and good. Those for whom the gaudy sensualities of the theatre are interdicted may here be entertained with the mild and harmless joys of an instructive diorama'.[81] The word 'instructive' is significant here, since panoramas were routinely described in reviews and booklets as having a clear didactic function, separating them from cheap amusements, another trope that would

Fig. 14. Poster for 'The Chas. W. Poole's Myrioramic Realizations'.
Fig. 15. Poster for 'The Chas. W. Poole's New Myrioramic Route Cairo to the Cape'.
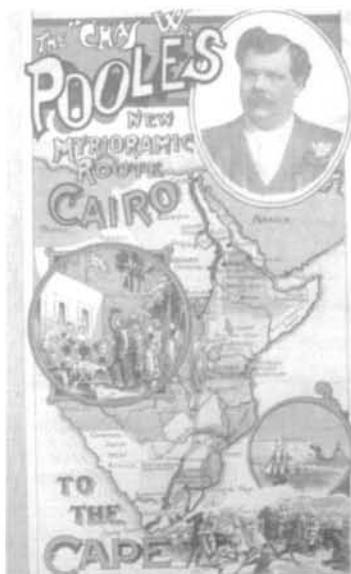
resurface in the context of early film promotion. Reviewing Philippoteaux's *Gettysburg* panorama in the *Chicago Times* in 1883, one critic was at pains to point out that the panorama had been erected and promoted 'without resort to any of the "circussing" advertising technique so common in our day'. The writer also noted that the 'stimulating influence of such an exhibition on the growth of a general public taste for the higher forms of art [could] hardly be overestimated'.[82]

Promoted as giant object lessons in the higher arts, panoramas anticipated the discursive construction of early cinema travelogues as 'moving geography lessons', in fact there are such remarkable correspondences between the rhetorical construction of panoramas and early cinema travelogues that early travelogue reviewers seemed possessed by the spirits of panorama art critics when they looked to education, armchair travel and refined entertainment as the cornerstones of the genre In the 'Descriptive Booklet' accompanying J R. Smith's 1855 panorama of the Mississippi, advertised as 'the largest moving panorama in the world', outdoing the hyperbolic excesses of Banvard's copywriters, the panorama becomes a

> moving lesson, a pictorial guide, a refined and elegant manner of bringing before the mind of the spectator the appearance and characteristics of different countries; and when properly conceived and executed, forms a means of cultivating a public taste for the fine arts and of directing the attention of many to seek after solid intellectual entertainment instead of light frivolous buffoonery, to view a something that when you shall have returned home you can say, I have added a great deal to my stock of information, I have a better idea of certain things – I am more qualified than before to give an opinion on that subject; the mind has been set to work, an *impression* had been made that will cause you to reflect and to seek further after knowledge [83]

The word 'impression' here connotes both the perceptual moulding of the experience as it registers in the spectator's mind and Webster's dictionary definition of 'impression' as 'an imitation or representation of salient features in an artistic or theatrical medium' [84] It thus points to the panorama's close ontological bond with the reenactment But it also speaks to an argument made by Ivone Margulies about reenactments conflating repetition with moral revision [85] Panoramas thus fulfilled this didactic function in both their selection of subject matter and in their rhetorical claim to improve upon one's memory of viewing the real thing by providing a more comprehensive, all-embracing view. Though the cinematic reenactments of the 1950s and 1990s discussed by Margulies are far removed from these earlier texts, her argument that what is most at stake in reenactments is 'an identity which can recall the original event (through a second-degree indexicality) but in so doing can also

82 Review of Paul Philippoteaux s Panorama of the Battle of Gettysburg permanently located at the corner of Wabash avenue and Hubbard corner, Chicago 1884 in *Chicago Times* 2 December 1883 n p cited in brochure for panorama at the NYHS

83 J R Smith Descriptive book of the tour of Europe the largest moving panorama in the world at the Chinese Rooms 539 Broadway NY Painted on 30,000 square feet of canvas from views taken on the spot and at an expense of $10,000 (Petitioner and Gray, 1855), p 3 Emphasis mine

84 *Webster s New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA G & C Merriam, 1977)

85 Ivone Margulies Exemplary bodies reenactments in *Love in the City Sons* and *Close-Up* in Margulies (ed) *Rites of Realism Essays on Corporeal Cinema* (Durham, NC Duke University Press 2003) pp 217–44

86 Ibid

reform it' is central to our understanding of the origins of reenactments [86]

This notion of enriched vision, of the panorama enhancing the original viewing experience through a superior form of visuality, is an enduring trope in panorama promotion and, I would argue, an epistemological tenet of reenactments. The idea of the reenactment as an improvement upon the original (inasmuch as it provided more information or perspectives not normally available to the tourist) can be seen in countless reviews of panoramas of Niagara Falls, which, more than any other panorama topic, was subject to the self-aggrandizement and rhetorical excesses of artists and art critics. Godfrey N Frankenstein's *Moving Panorama of Niagara*, which opened in 1853 at Broadway's Hope Chapel in New York City, offers a fascinating window onto mid nineteenth-century panorama exhibition For audiences who had actually visited Niagara Falls (Kevin J. Avery points out that 1853 was the year the first railroad line ran to the site),[87] the panorama's multiperspectivalism gave them 'a better conception of it, than they ever had before' for the simple reason, one critic noted, that Frankenstein had spent the last nine years sketching and painting the falls [88] Reviewing the enormous painting in the *Literary World*, another critic pointed out that 'we see Niagara above the falls, and far below. . We have it sideways and lengthways we look down upon it; we look up at it; we are before it, behind it, in it. . . . We are there in sunlight and moonlight, summer and winter, catching its accidental effects of mist and light, alternately awed by its subliminity and fascinated by its beauty.'[89] One cannot help but notice the implicit cinematic quality of this multiperspectivalism, almost as if a logic of montage was at work in constructing these dramatic views of Niagara Another reviewer noted that 'looking upon it takes one back to the original, re-awakening the feelings of wonder and delight there experienced', while yet another felt that 'one can almost realize they are standing within the roar of the mighty waste of water, or the cool refreshing vapors of its foamy billow'.[90] Moving away from what Avery calls the 'vehicular, linear conceit' of typical moving panoramas, Frankenstein's *Niagara* gave audiences edited highlights of the falls represented in different seasons, in addition to a tour of the Cave of the Woods and a virtual journey on the *Maid of the Mists*, Frankenstein updated his panorama with topical inserts such as the collapse of Table Rock at the Canadian Falls and a boatman's fatal plunge which dominated newspaper headlines for days, as the sailor clung to the rocks before finally losing his grip [91]

The reenactment's mnemonic function, its ability to stimulate the memory sensors and transport spectators metaphorically (and phantasmatically) back to the depicted scene, is vividly captured in a review of the painting from the *New York Observer* which states that while the 'same emotions of sublimity which are excited by the

87 Avery, Movies for manifest destiny p 8

88 According to Joseph Earl Arrington, Godfrey Frankenstein was assisted by his two other brothers (unnamed) and by American panoramist William Burr who in 1848 had painted his own moving panorama of the Great Lakes, Niagara, St Lawrence and Sergeant Rivers Information in Arrington, John Banvard s moving panorama of The Mississippi Missouri and Ohio Rivers', *The Wilson Club Historical Quarterly*, vol 32, no 3 (1958) p 211 and Arrington William Burr's moving panorama', pp 141–62

89 Anonymous Review of Mr Frankenstein s panorama of Niagara *Literary World*, 23 July 1853, n p, cited in promotional brochure of Frankenstein s panorama of Niagara p 9 housed at the NYHS

90 Anonymous and untitled review of Frankenstein's panorama from *US Argues* n d, n p, cited in Frankenstein s panorama of Niagara' NYHS p 6, review of Frankenstein s panorama from *The True National Democrat* n d n p cited in ibid

91 Avery, Movies for manifest destiny p 8

92 Frankenstein panorama of
Niagara', *The Observer*
18 August 1853, n p , cited in
Frankenstein s panorama of
Niagara' NYHS p 12
Emphasis mine

natural scene. cannot, of course, be elicited by a picture . . . [it]
serves to *revive the remembrance* of those emotions. and in reality
brings before the eye a striking representation of Niagara itself'.[92]
This idea of the panorama appealing to audiences both familiar and
unfamiliar with a certain locale was a fairly standard rhetorical trope
in panorama promotional literature: for example, in a programme
advertising Hamilton's *New Overland Route to India, Via Paris,*
Mont Cenis, Brindisi, and the Suez Canal, audiences were told that
'those familiar with the scenes depicted will recognize the
truthfulness of the representations, and enjoy the reminiscences,

93 London Playbills Scrapbook
GLCL, p 52

while others will form as accurate an idea of the appearance of the
various places as if they had been visited in reality'.[93] But while one
reviewer claimed that it required 'only the least degree of
imagination to believe that our bodies are keeping company with our
thoughts. and that we are in person surveying this indescribable work
of the Almighty', another was at pains to point out that despite the
'striking naturalness of the scene', the panorama was still 'almost a
reproduction' of the World's Wonder. not, we should note, the real

94 Mr Frankenstein s panorama
U S Argues n d n p cited in
Frankenstein s panorama of
Niagara', NYHS, p 12,
Frankenstein s panorama of
Niagara', *Evening Mirror,*
25 July 1853, n p cited in ibid
p 10

thing.[94] Acknowledging that the panorama was never anything more
than an illusion, most reviewers tempered their hyperbole with
qualifiers, such as this one from the *Penny Magazine* in 1842 'if the
groupings and general arrangement be natural, and if attention be
paid to the modifying tint which results from the state of the
atmosphere at different times of the day', the author noted, then the
eye and the mind would be affected 'nearly in the same way as by

95 'On cosmoramas', p 363

the original objects themselves'.[95]
    Nevertheless, as a recursive mode of representation, one premissed
upon the idea of the panorama experience as an infinitely repeatable
effect, the panorama invites us to share communion with the artist
whose 'true' eye, we are told. 'detects much of the beautiful that

96 'Mr Frankenstein's Niagara ,
Spiritual Telegraph n d n p
cited in Frankenstein's
panorama of Niagara p 16
NYHS
97 Margulies Exemplary
pp 217–44

escapes the common observer'.[96] Through the repetition of place,
time and a 'seeing body',[97] our vision is aligned with that of the
artist; and yet, in witnessing the scene through the panorama artist's
eyes, we are constantly reminded of its status as spectacle, especially
in the 360-degree circular panorama, where. as Wolfgang Born
argues, we are 'expected to disregard traditional aesthetic standards
such as unity of space and pictorial quality in favour of what might

98 Wolfgang Born *American*
Landscape Painting (Westport
MA Greenwood Press 1948)
p 86

be called cosmic effect'.[98] The panorama thus invited suspension of
disbelief at the same time as it vividly reminded spectators of its
plasticity

Death and illusion: some final thoughts on the panorama as *trompe l'oeil*

In its status as a liminal form oscillating between fiction and fact.
absence and presence, now and then. the reenactment seems on some
levels to share a certain quality with the moment of death (and thus

99 Andre Bazin 'The myth of total cinema' in Hugh Gray (ed) *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1967) p 21

invoke Bazin's 'mummy complex' behind cinema's invention), when the body appears in the world, but can no longer be considered a part of it.[99] Of course the reenactment (and panorama) also share a great deal in common with the waxwork, not only were reenactments extremely popular organizational principles of mid to late nineteenth-century waxworks, but the waxwork itself was in phenomenological concert with the idea of suspended or cheated death The moist, luminous surface of wax shared a similar pallor with the cadaver, and while panoramas and waxworks strove to suppress the moment of death, they could never escape the spectre of death as an ominous referent Popularized by Madame Tussaud around the same time as the emergence of the panorama, waxworks turned to the day's headlines, especially news about the monarchy and military exploits, for narrative vignettes that could be reproduced in wax The same pedagogical rhetoric that was used to promote panoramas – uplifting and educational experiences – also surfaced in waxwork publicity [100]

100 While a great deal more could be said about the correspondences between the panorama reeactment and waxwork, space precludes going into greater depth on the subject For more on how discourses of realism and spectacle play out in the waxwork exhibit in particular the late nineteenth-century Musée Grevin in Paris, see Schwartz *Spectacular Realities* pp 89–148
101 Ibid, pp 90 104

Part and parcel of what historian Vanessa Schwartz calls the 'spectacularization of reality', waxworks created endless opportunities for intertextuality, for example, despite competing for the same public, a wax tableau entitled *Les coulisses d'un panorama* at the Musée Grévin in Paris showed the military painter Edouard Détaille putting finishing touches to his panorama of the Battle of Rezonville.[101]

Many commentators, at the time and subsequently, have evoked the theme of death in an attempt to make sense of the ambivalent appeal of the reenactment, panorama and waxwork On one level, death seems an apposite metaphor when thinking about reenactments and panoramas, since both still and moving panoramas were obsessed with death in their countless representations of nineteenth-century battle scenes. We should also not forget the fact that in today's world of twenty-four-hour satellite television, the reenactment has found a home in several infotainment genres, including true-crime programmes in which acts of murder are reconstructed using actors in the hope of triggering the television audience's memory of the crime and providing additional leads for investigators [102]

102 In the UK *Crimewatch* is the most notable in the US infotainment shows such as *America's Most Wanted* and *Inside Edition* make extensive use of the reenactment in sensationalist ways

Beyond its literal representation in many panoramas, the spectre of death seemed implicated in the medium's own mode of representation: like a cadaver, the hyperrealist canvas resembles a living being on the surface, but cannot really be considered alive. And yet there is a paradox in the reenactment's close resemblance to death on the one hand and its seeming ability to shake off death's grip on the other As a 'moment that nobody can describe, an event that nobody can escape, a process that nobody can narrate', in Mieke Bal's words, death also looks to the reenactment as a way of overcoming its finality, since the reenactment can show what escapes representation or what may be impossible to represent at all as a live event The panorama thus seems to embody death and deny it at the

103 Mieke Bal *Reading Rembrandt Beyond the Word–Image Opposition* (New York Cambridge University Press 1991), pp 362 375

104 Ibid, p 375

105 W Telbin 'The painting of panoramas' *The Magazine of Art*, vol 24 (1900), p 557 Emphasis mine

106 Maxim Gorky, 'The kingdom of shadows' originally published in the *Nizhegorodski listok* newspaper, 4 July 1896 and signed I M Pacatus (Gorky's pseudonym) Trans Leda Swan from Jay Leyda, *Kino* (London Allen and Unwin 1960) reprinted in Kevin MacDonald and Mark Cousins *Imagining Reality the Faber Book of Documentary* (London Faber and Faber, 1996) pp 6–10

107 The Mesdag Panorama in The Hague has a narration that highlights all the salient features of the painting It plays in either Dutch, German English French or Spanish at the request of the tourist groups present When the museum is quiet, a CD playing ambient sound effects such as bird calls and the ocean substitutes for the narration Mesdag Panorama director Marijnke de Jong notes that some visitors complain about the narration finding it intrusive and distracting While sympathetic to their wish to experience the panorama in silence the ambient sound is rarely turned off since the majority of visitors seem to quite like it Author interview with de Jong, 14 July 2001, The Hague

same time, constructing a motionless universe that can stand in as a facsimile of the actual location or event.[103] In the same way that death is a challenge to representation, oscillating 'between a state and an event', according to Bal, the panorama similarly hovers between being a sensation, an experience, and a two-dimensional representation.[104]

If death permeates the panoramic reenactment as a result of its fraught relationship to both the real and the imaginary, there is also a way in which the optical field of the circular panorama, with its arrested motion, gigantic scale, and immersive feel, exacerbated the death-like aura of the form; it swallowed up spectators with a sublimity and breathtaking force in which some found an analogy with an out-of-body, near-death experience At least one contemporaneous spectator claimed that an 'aspect slightly of death' could be sensed in the viewing of all cycloramas (circular panoramas), particularly when the painting conveyed a great deal of action Admitting that the same might be said of non-panoramic paintings, the author nevertheless argued that panoramas demanded a great deal more of audiences than gallery works:

We see the rush of waters, eddying and swirling at our very feet, but we hear no sound, none of the din and roar that accompanies the fall of a great cascade The foreground has the appearance of being the real rock, ingeniously clothed with moss and grass, and illuminated by the actual daylight; beyond one sees a party of tourists enjoying the grand prospect of the tumbling waters, but all is still, we return to find them *fixed as death*.[105]

In the same way that Maxim Gorky found in the shadow plays of early cinema a ghostly, death-like quality, some panorama spectators reported that the eerie stillness combined with the spectacular scale and illusionism lent a funereal solemnity to the occasion of viewing at least some panoramas [106] Lending the landscape a static quality reminiscent of the painted backgrounds of museums of natural history dioramas, panoramas placed spectators at the centre of their optically embalmed scene. The effect might at times have been disorienting, if not outright disquieting, for unlike submitting one's gaze to a flat, moving panorama, or a two-dimensional moving picture screen, the spectator stands at the centre of this reconstructed universe, breathing in the ghostly air without any sound, save the hushed murmurs of fellow spectators. While the lack of diegetic sound doubtless added to the death-like effect in both panoramas and very early cinema, not all panoramas were cloaked in silence; like films, moving panoramas were rarely if ever exhibited in silence and there are many instances of music accompanying circular panoramas Nevertheless, it was not uncommon to walk up the stairs and emerge from the darkened corridor onto the belvedere into a deathly silence, as noted by the above contemporaneous spectator.[107] Describing the

spectatorial experience in 1900, long after the heyday of panoramas, W Telbin claimed that 'the audience ... in sympathy with this immovable world, speak in undertones, we do not hear the free criticisms and the small talk and general gossip'. Referring perhaps unwittingly to cinema's kineticism – one assumes that Telbin had heard of, if not yet seen, cinema by 1900 – he goes on to argue that 'possibly in the future we may have a pictorial exhibition combining all that art – and artfulness or trickery – can do'.[108] Perhaps more so than battle panoramas, scenes of natural beauty invited a contemplative, reflective gaze that one might associate with a solemn occasion such as a funeral; as Bruno Ernst has pointed out, an encounter with a panorama, in this case, the Hendrik Mesdag panorama in The Hague, is 'an encounter with stillness and peace', a reminder for nineteenth-century audiences of the transitory nature of life and their own mortality.[109]

108 Telbin, 'The painting', p 557

109 Bruno Ernst, 'Perspective and illusion' in The Magical Panorama, p 123

As a form of mass entertainment that anticipated cinema and, some have argued, was superseded by motion pictures at the end of the nineteenth century, the panorama shared a great many phenomenological features with film. like film, panoramas were hyperrealist representations on vast canvases that resembled cinema's widescreen formats of the 1950s and today's 360-degree domed Imax Solido screens, where spectators stand in the middle of an image which is projected all around.[110] As Miller argues, 'the panorama – like the cinema – manufactured a new reality, condensing time, editing the visual field, amplifying certain aspects of perceived reality while diminishing others' [111] The panorama revival of the late nineteenth century, as Miller points out, would have clearly inspired early filmmakers, 'both in their pursuit of particular visual effects and in their choice of subject matter' [112] Just as panorama painters turned to Niagara Falls and topical stories for inspiration, so too did early cinema exhibitors [113] That panoramas were drawn almost exclusively from actual events and real locations as opposed to literary or mythological subjects imbued them with a special cathartic or therapeutic value, a place to find repose in the rapidly industrialized metropolis, even if this involved a full view of the battle panorama's horrors of warfare By the second half of the nineteenth century, panoramas may have offered audiences temporary respite from the rush of modernity and, like the early motion picture theatre, provided working-class audiences a place to exercise control over some portion of their daily lives, increasingly ruled by the assembly line and transport timetable If the visual excesses of battle panoramas in profiling developments in modern warfare were hardly conducive to calming the overstimulated urban mind, the central elevated viewing platform of the circular panorama nevertheless gave cramped urban spectators momentary sovereignty over all surveyed.

110 For more on the connection between panoramas and large-screen imaging technologies such as Imax see Griffiths, '"The largest picture

111 Miller, 'The panorama p 52

112 Ibid, p 56

113 For more on the relationship between landscape painting and early cinema see Iris Cahn The changing landscape of modernity early film and America's great picture tradition, Wide Angle vol 18 no 3 (1996) pp 85–100

placing them at the heart of a simulated universe where they looked down upon the world. It was perhaps in this sense of superiority afforded by the downward gaze that the panorama laid claim to a gendered element, reassuring male spectators that their dominion over the world below lay unchallenged. But men were not alone on the viewing platforms, sharing the social space with women who took an equal pleasure in the visual sovereignty that came with surveying the panorama. Indeed, one might argue that it was women's attendance at panoramas that established norms of spectating that would later carry through into the early cinema period.

And yet, as I have argued elsewhere, there was something strange, even disconcerting, about seeing the world in this familiar yet obviously contrived way [114] Charles Baudelaire, for one, was not a fan of panoramas, arguing in his essay 'The Salon of 1845' that Monsieur Horace Vernet's paintings of a recent French victory in North Africa 'consisted merely of a host of interesting little anecdotes' and were fit only 'for the walls of a tavern'.[115] Baudelaire had even less sympathy for the military and patriotic panorama, a genre that was sweeping western Europe at the time:

> I hate this art thought up to the beat of drums, these canvases daubed at the gallop, this painting fabricated by pistol-shot, just as I hate the army, armed power and anyone who clanks weapons noisily around in a peaceful place This enormous popularity, which, moreover, will last no longer than war itself, and which will fade away as nations find other ways of amusing themselves, this popularity, I repeat, this *vox populi, vox Dei,* simply oppresses me.[116]

Needless to say, Baudelaire was probably not alone in despising the jingoistic appeal of panoramas and recoiling at any claim for the artistic merit of the panorama reenactment. The panorama's success in exploiting the reenactment form was inevitably the result of a confluence of factors, ranging from the aesthetic and ideological demands of the era to the tireless efforts of individual panorama promoters who struggled to keep the genre alive

Panoramas aimed to evoke the sublime through both the eye and body of the spectator: size really did matter in this era of colonial and technological expansion, and panoramas offered spectators vicarious identification with the players of history and a privileged vantage point on some of nature's most prized beauty. As Fruitema and Zoetmulder have argued, 'the forceful way in which the panorama turned out to meet the visual needs of the public explains its resounding success as the cinema of the nineteenth century'[117] At the same time, early cinema audiences would have been thoroughly familiar with the cinematic idea of the reenactment long before the emergence of motion pictures: given the longevity of the panorama as a mode of visuality – they were around for a good hundred years

114 Griffiths, "The largest picture

115 Charles Baudelaire The Salon of 1845 *Selected Writings on Art and Literature* trans and ed P E Charvet (Harmondsworth Penguin 1992), pp 87–8 cited in Paret, *Imagined Battles* p 80

116 Ibid

117 Fruitema and Zoetmulder, *The Panorama Phenomenon* p 30

or so before the invention of cinema – it makes perfect sense that audiences had few problems understanding reenactments when they saw them in the cinema Panoramas thus trained the nineteenth-century spectator to make sense of the large-scale circular or moving viewpoint, and in so doing, helped pave the way for the emergence of cinema. While panoramas are certainly not the only significant aesthetic and ideological precursors to motion pictures, their legacy can be felt today in our continued desire to represent our world with perfect illusionism, especially those experiences which lay outside the realm of normal human events, such as ascending the heights of Mount Everest, being on the space shuttle Discovery, or scuba diving off the coast of the Galapagos Islands, to cite just a few recent Imax titles Popular fascination with the 360-degree view has never been exhausted, but rather ebbed and flowed throughout the two hundred years since Barker first patented his *coupe d'oeil* in 1787 As Imax and 360-degree internet technologies become enduring features of our cultural and commercial landscape, we should not lose sight of their giant, painterly ancestors.

The open image: poetic realism and the New Iranian Cinema

SHOHINI CHAUDHURI and HOWARD FINN

When Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Safar e Ghandehar/Kandahar* was screened at London's Institute for Contemporary Arts in Autumn 2001 it drew sell-out audiences, as it did in other European and North American cities. The film's success, partly due to its timely release, also reflects an enthusiasm internationally for Iranian films which has been gathering momentum in recent years. This essay focuses on one characteristic of 'New Iranian Cinema' which has evidently intrigued both critics and audiences, namely the foregrounding of a certain type of ambiguous, epiphanic image. We attempt to explore these images, which we have chosen – very simply – to call 'open images'. One might read these images directly in terms of the political and cultural climate of the Islamic Republic which engendered them, as part of the broader ongoing critical debate on the relationship of these films to contemporary Iranian social reality Our intention, however, is primarily to draw structural and aesthetic comparisons across different national cinemas, to show, among other things. how a repressed political dimension returns within the ostensibly apolitical aesthetic form of the open image.

The term 'image' encompasses shot, frame and scene, and includes sound components – open images may deploy any of these elements. Open images are not necessarily extraordinary images, they often belong to the order of the everyday. While watching a film one may meet them with some resistance – yet they have the property of producing virtual after-images in the mind. Although their effects are ambiguous. the images exhibit identifiable signs and techniques. and this essay provides a classification of the open image drawing on

concepts from Pier Paolo Pasolini's theory of poetic realism, Paul Schrader's notion of the arrested image – stasis – as a cinematic signifier of transcendence, and Gilles Deleuze's theory of the time-image. We will sketch out the historical emergence of the open image in Italian neorealism and its reflexive turn in the French new wave, and then apply our account of the open image to particular films drawn from the New Iranian Cinema.

Pasolini: poetic neorealism

The influence of Italian neorealism and the French new wave on Iranian cinema is commonly asserted – and hotly contested. Within Iran, this trend in critical debate might appear as another 'injection' of cultural imperialism, which the revolutionary regime has sought to resist by curtailing imports of first world cinema and actively promoting appreciation of films from the developing world.[1] However, we will argue that it is with reason that critics invoke Italian and French antecedents, because of the crucial role these cinemas played in the historical formation of the open image.

Those who oppose the 'hackneyed' references to neorealism in discussions on Iranian cinema tend to over-emphasize neorealism's so-called 'realist' aspects.[2] This use of reality as a yardstick to measure neorealism, whether it be in terms of its social content or its aesthetics, has resulted in the dominant framing of the middle and late works of Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni as 'post' neorealist. We prefer to emphasize a poetic conception of neorealism and, consequently, argue that these directors do not represent a break with neorealism: rather, they bring forward poetic qualities which were inherent in neorealism from the beginning.[3]

This poetic conception is articulated in Pasolini's essay 'The cinema of poetry' (1965) Pasolini claims that filmmakers imbue the 'image-signs' they use with their personal expression as well as giving them general meanings.[4] These signs can eventually acquire conventional meanings (as they have in Hollywood codes), constituting a 'cinema of prose'. At the other extreme is the 'cinema of poetry', made possible by the cinematic counterpart of free indirect discourse in literature: the 'free indirect subjective'. Here, the filmmaker's viewpoint becomes one with the character's, Pasolini refers to instances in *Deserto Rosso/Red Desert* (1964), in which Antonioni's viewpoint merges with that of the neurotic heroine Giuliana The colours and objects around Giuliana are transformed in accordance with her psychological state – a cart of fruit turns grey to reflect her uncertainty, an industrial workshop dominated by the colour of bright red plastic directly materializes her sense of danger. We no longer have the objective shot (which corresponds to indirect

1 General Department of Cinematographic Research and Relations, *Post Revolution Iranian Cinema* (Tehran Ministry of Ershad-e Eslami, 1982) p 8

2 See Mir-Ahmad-e Mir-Ehsan Dark light', in Rose Issa and Sheila Whitaker (eds) *Life and Art the New Iranian Cinema* (London British Film Institute, 1999) p 113

3 Sam Rohdie makes a similar point when, tracing connections between Rossellini and post neorealism he argues that the reality' Italian neorealism reflects is the 'reality' of film language its experimentation with language implies concerns beyond the merely representational Sam Rohdie *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (London British Film Institute 1995) pp 15–16

4 Pier Paolo Pasolini, The cinema of poetry in Bill Nichols (ed) *Movies and Methods an Anthology* Volume I (Berkeley, CA University of California Press 1976), p 544

discourse) nor the subjective shot (direct discourse), but *a vision which has liberated itself from the two* – the free indirect subjective.

Pasolini traces the free indirect subjective (and with it the cinema of poetry) from Roberto Rossellini and the founding works of Italian neorealism Compared to the overdetermined narrative image-sign system of the cinema of prose, the images that constitute the cinema of poetry are infinite in possibility, but can be identified in terms of the cinematic style or means by which they are achieved. Pasolini notes a few of the characteristics of these free indirect subjective images under the heading of 'obsessive framing' the close juxtaposition of shots showing slightly different viewpoints of the same object, the static shot of a scene in which characters enter and leave the frame, the stillness of a shot upon an object. The free indirect subjective image is rooted in the diegesis (the character and narrative perspective) and the obsessive vision (psychology/aesthetic) of the filmmaker, yet such images cannot be straightforwardly deciphered as a revelation of either a character's psychological state or that of the filmmaker [5] Instead the unresolved tension between the two viewpoints – character and filmmaker – creates an ambiguity, a space in which the image appears to emerge from somewhere other This 'other' perspective is often, as in Antonioni's films, felt to reside in the camera itself, particularly in those scenes where the camera continues recording empty reality after people and identifiable human consciousness have departed – the camera as the uncanny eye of surveillance. Commenting on Pasolini's theory of the free indirect subjective, Deleuze refers to this emphasis on a 'reflecting consciousness' distinct from that of both character and director as a 'camera consciousness . a properly cinematographic *Cogito*' [6] However, we would prefer to stress not an imagined source of subjective or subjectless viewpoint, but rather the otherness of the images as objects, as intrusions of the real – having taken on a degree of autonomy from all identifiable viewpoints

5 Ibid, pp 552–3

6 Gilles Deleuze *Cinema 1 Movement Image*, trans Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London Athlone Press, 1992), p 74

Schrader: images of stasis

A common characteristic of the open image is stasis. An obvious indication of this in several of the Iranian films to be discussed is the use of the long-held freeze-frame as closing image: *Nun va Goldun/Moment of Innocence* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1996), *Nama-ye Nazdik/Close-Up* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1989) and *Sib/The Apple* (Samira Makhmalbaf, 1998) all end on a freeze-frame and they all freeze characters mid-action – that is, in overt movement. As a cinematic device this can probably be traced back to the influence of the famous closing freeze-frame of Antoine running towards the sea in François Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups/400 Blows* (1959) – the new wave film closest in sensibility to New Iranian Cinema One

of the few attempts to elaborate an aesthetic of stasis remains Schrader's *Transcendental Style* (1972). Among the key characteristics of what he calls 'transcendental style' are the following

> • The everyday: a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living, involving understated acting and dedramatization.
> • Disparity: an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment, which culminates in a decisive action
> • Stasis, a frozen view of life, which does not resolve the preceding disparity but transcends it.[7]

7   Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film Ozu Bresson Dreyer* (New York Da Capo, 1972), pp 39 42 49

What Schrader calls the 'stasis shot' within his stylistics of the transcendental style is close to our conception of the open image within the stylistics of neorealism, insofar as they both involve the fracturing of the everyday by something 'other' (Dedramatization and disparity, too, have a bearing on the production of open images, as we shall see.)

An aesthetic of stasis appears paradoxical given that an essential component of cinema is movement. Cinema can be seen as opposed to the photograph: even though it is constituted by still photographs, these are not perceived as such in the act of viewing, although they may be extracted (as distinct frames). As Jean Mitry, among others, has noted, the photographic image has a melancholy relationship to its referent:

> The photograph of a person retains the impression of his presence It constantly refers back to him. His going away merely reinforces the impression that this image is the only testimony of what his physical appearance was at a particular moment in his existence [8]

8   Jean Mitry *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film* trans Christopher King (London Athlone Press 2000) p 31

In the cinematic image this 'testimony' is desired yet paradoxical, out of reach (because the moving image is always moving beyond the particular moment) We would argue that the stylistics of 'transcendental' stasis common to the open image is, in part, an attempt to imbue the moving image with the photographic aura. Following Henri Bergson and William James,[9] we can presume that it is inevitable that the moving image of real-time duration will be broken down by memory into discrete images of moments and then synthesized or reconstructed into a privileged static image or a series of quasi-static images. Memory privileges the fleeting motionless image over direct visual representation of duration

9   Henri Bergson *Matter and Memory* trans N M Paul and W S Palmer (New York Zone Books, 1991), William James *Principles of Psychology* Volume I (London Macmillan 1890)

The photographic aura accrues to the cinematic image of stasis as an 'always already' recollected image. The image from a film that impresses itself upon our consciousness constantly refers back to its *presence* Echoing Mitry, the fact that we are no longer watching the film, the fact that we saw it five hours or five years ago, 'merely reinforces the impression that this image is the only testimony' not

only of the 'appearance' of the film, but of *our experience* of watching the film 'at a particular moment' of our existence. The static image thus finds itself embroiled in notions of presence, absence and death, especially when it is experienced in cinema – that is, in relation to moving images, and to duration. It is the aura of the fixed, static image which throws the passing of time, of existence, into relief; and all these existential terms suggest that the religious underpinning of Schrader's 'transcendentalist style' – an anathema to most film theorists – is impossible to repress.

In the examples from Iranian cinema to be discussed, stasis (arrested images, the fixed long-shot, the freeze-frame or images of empty spaces) will be seen as auspicious for open images, but not invariably so Although Schrader equates stasis, austerity and what he terms the 'sparse' with transcendental style, he points out that the long-take stasis films of avant-garde art, usually depicting objects in real time (the minimalist cinema of Michael Snow or today's video installations), fail to evoke the transcendental effect – such an effect is only produced by stasis as a break within 'realist' narrative: for an image to be 'arrested' it must previously flow.[10]

Likewise, we contend that the open image only has meaning as a deferral of an otherwise implied narrative closure It is this context that gives rise to viewer resistance to stasis, experienced as boredom, though boredom might be an integral part of the aesthetic experience – for the diachronic arts, especially film, the occasional 'space' of boredom is a way in which real-time duration is defamiliarized and then made retrievable to the reconstructed imaging of memory. It may be the *longueur* that facilitates the 'opening' of image in narrative The experience of resistance, of boredom, may be transformed into the experience of the transcendental, of ecstasy. In Schrader's words: 'When the image stops, the viewer keeps going, moving deeper and deeper, one might say, into the image This is the "miracle" of sacred art.'[11]

10 Schrader *Transcendental Cinema* p 160

11 Ibid p 161

Deleuze: the time-image

Deleuze's writings on cinema, *Cinema 1 The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2 The Time-Image* (1985), investigate the opening out of the image in direct images of time, not external, chronological time, but the time of concrete duration. These direct time-images are characterized by a lack of causal links Movement-images, on the other hand, are defined by causal links. In Deleuze's neurological terminology, movement-images show 'sensory-motor' connections between stimulus and response Something is seen, for example, and an action, perception or feeling is given as a reaction.[12] The time-image is created when such sensory-motor links in the image are suspended or broken. When the situation no longer

12 Deleuze *Cinema 1* p 70

13 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 The Time-Image* trans Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London Athlone Press, 1994) p 18

extends into action, films give rise to pure optical and sound situations Something has become 'too strong' in the image, something which cannot be reduced to what happens or what is perceived or felt (by the characters).[13] The break between movement-images and time-images is not clear-cut, but generally time-images belong to cinema's 'postclassical' phase Time-images are connotative rather than denotative, imbuing objects with a number of associations. Deleuze suggests they might have political implications 'It is precisely the weakness of the motor linkages, the weak connections', he writes, 'that are capable of releasing huge forces of disintegration', producing images of process, of transformation, such images are not an obscurantist turning away from the political, but the open-ended politicization of the image [14] This argument has become relevant again in the light of the controversy surrounding the (a)political trajectory of the New Iranian Cinema [15]

14 Ibid, p 19

15 Controversy over the politics of internationally successful Iranian films reflects ideological tensions amongst intellectuals in Iran and in Iranian exile circles For criticism of Kiarostami and the 'festival film' see for example, Azadeh Farahmand, 'Perspectives on recent (international acclaim for) Iranian cinema' in Richard Tapper (ed), *The New Iranian Cinema Politics Representation and Identity* (London IB Tauris 2002) pp 86–108 This debate has also had some impact amongst non-Iranian critics The often unenthusiastic reviews of Iranian films in *Sight and Sound* during the 1990s tended to characterize the films as sentimental and apolitical See for example Simon Louvish's review of *The White Balloon, Sight and Sound*, vol 6 no 1 (1996) p 57 and subsequent responses in the letters pages vol 6, no 3 (1996) p 64 vol 6, no 4 (1996), p 64

In Deleuze's account, Italian neorealism is the film movement that most epitomizes the break between the movement-image and the time-image. This break came about, he claims, for reasons both internal and external to cinema. External circumstances were provided by postwar devastation, reconstruction and diaspora. As cities were demolished and rebuilt, wastelands (such as derelict and disused out-of-town sites) proliferated, and people became displaced from their settings, the determinate environments associated with the movement-image became blurred. After World War II, circumstances internal to cinema made it ready to respond to these external conditions, particularly in postfascist Italy The sensory-motor links between motivation and action gave way to new forms, such as the meandering journey, which accorded more with the transformed landscapes. Cinema gave rise to images of indeterminate settings – 'any-spaces-whatever'[16] which became pure optical and sound situations.

16 Deleuze *Cinema 2*, p 5

When we turn the emphasis from neorealism's 'realism' to its poeticism and its production of pure optical and sound situations, the ground on which the common view of neorealism stands begins to shift. No longer can we see it simply in terms of its commitment to record 'reality'. All those features which justified that view – its association with nonprofessional actors, contemporary social and political topics dealing with ordinary people, combining fictional drama with documentary, and location shooting – must be put into contact with something else. The settings retain their reality, but they are no longer situations that disclose actions as they would in traditional realism. Instead, they open onto thought, dream, memory and feelings of *déjà-vu*, as the action 'floats' in the situation. Viewers no longer perceive a sensory-motor image to which they respond by identifying with the characters Instead, they undergo 'a dream-like connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs '[17]

17 Ibid p 4

18 Ibid p 48

19 Ibid p 54

20 Ibid, pp 54–5

21 Ibid, p 6

Rather than extending into movement, the pure optical and sound image enters into relation with a virtual image, and 'forms a circuit with it', as if it has linked up with an image we recall from somewhere else.[18] But it is most effective when our memory falters and we cannot remember: as Bergson realized, 'attentive recognition informs us to a much greater degree when it fails than when it succeeds', and the same applies to cinema.[19] When the present optical perception fails to make a link with either a motor-image or a recollection-image, 'it enters into relation with genuinely virtual elements, feelings of *déjà-vu* or the past "in general" (I must have seen that man somewhere . .), dream images (I have the feeling that I saw him in a dream . .)'.[20] This opening-out of the image seems to occur regardless of the content – the images may be of 'everyday banality' or 'exceptional limit-circumstances', but their predominant optical and sound situations. Deleuze writes, are 'subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies'.[21]

Neorealist location: disconnected spaces

The discussion so far is pertinent not only to work that is generally termed 'post' neorealist, but also to the key neorealist films such as Rossellini's war trilogy, Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette/Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and Visconti's *La Terra Trema/The Earth Trembles* (1948). There is a formalism and a penchant for aestheticized stasis in Visconti's vision – and a corresponding deployment of devices that would come to be associated with the poetic postneorealism of Antonioni and Pasolini (such as fixed shots as characters enter and exit the frame). Thus, *La Terra Trema* exploits the effects of documenting social reality and combines this with fictional (re)construction by way of a formalist aesthetic, a combination prefiguring – amongst much else – the most widely-recognized strategy of the New Iranian Cinema, from Kiarostami's *Close-Up* to Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple*.

The 'reality effects' in *La Terra Trema* would be nothing without the visual stylization and theatrical staging that characterizes each shot The film makes striking compositions out of the natural surroundings – with views of the rocks which enclose the harbour and the image of the women, their black shawls billowing in the wind, standing on rocks, straining seaward for the brothers' return. The film keeps returning to the view of the rocks. which might be seen as an attempt to anchor the story in a specific locale – the rocks being signs of a distinctive, recognizable place However, silhouetted in the dusk they become ambiguous and, in our associations, break free from their geographically-specific moorings and also from their symbolic moorings (where they represent the isolation of the village from the outside world) They are no longer the rocks of a particular

harbour in Sicily, but (to adapt the Deleuzian term) 'any-rocks-whatever'.

This brings us to another aspect of neorealism's break with traditional realism While the latter is characterized by determined spaces, neorealism loses the specific geospatial coordinates of a given locale and rearranges the references Deleuze contends that one can refer to 'Riemanian spaces' in neorealism, where the 'connecting of parts is not predetermined but can take place in many ways'.[22] Landscapes or cityscapes attain a hallucinatory, crystalline quality that looks forward to later Antonioni (the trilogy, *Red Desert*, *Zabriskie Point* [1969]) or the Zone in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). Such spatial indeterminacy is a feature of the New Iranian Cinema, in which a character's quest traverses the labyrinthine pathway of either city streets (*Badkonak-e Sefid/The White Balloon* [Jafar Panahi, 1995], *Dayereh/The Circle* [Jafar Panahi, 2000]), the tracks of villages/rural areas (*Khaneh-ye Dust Kojast/Where Is My Friend's House?* [Abbas Kiarostami, 1987], *Zir-e Darakhtan-e Zeytun/Through the Olive Trees* [Abbas Kiarostami, 1994], *Bad Mara Khahad Bord/The Wind Will Carry Us* [Abbas Kiarostami, 1999]) or passes over barren mountainous landscapes (*Takhteh Siyah/Blackboards* [Samira Makhmalbaf, 1999], *Zamani Baraye Masti Asbha/A Time for Drunken Horses* [Bahman Ghobadi, 2000]) Alternatively, characters may navigate the labyrinthine topology of the liminal space where equally barren city and rural environments meet (*Ta'm-e Gilas/A Taste of Cherry* [Abbas Kiarostami, 1997]) The circuitous quest makes even the most concrete places fleetingly uncanny – both for the character and for the viewer.

Deleuze refers to the 'dispersive and lacunary reality' in Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946), where locales fragment into unstable configurations [23] This feature is carried further in Antonioni, where the Deleuzian 'any-space-whatever' is constituted from geometrical blocks of whites, shadows and colours – starting with almost empty urban riverbank shots in *Netteza Urbana* (1948), and the deserted stadium in *Cronaca di un Amore/Chronicle of a Love* (1950), going on to the final scene showing the rendezvous point devoid of protagonists in *L'Eclisse/The Eclipse* (1962) and the industrial landscapes of *Red Desert* These emptied or disconnected spaces obtain a relative autonomy from the surrounding narrative, enabling them to become open images.

The neorealist locations inspired by the indeterminate environments created by the postwar situation attract a new type of protagonist who – because images no longer obey sensory-motor rules – tends to see rather than act For this reason, as Deleuze suggests, the role of the child, who mostly looks on in wonder or confusion while unable to intervene, becomes significant [24] In this development, where the child's gaze and the pure optical and sound image meet, neorealism is clearly the crucial turning point (for example, Rossellini's

22 Ibid, p 129

23 Deleuze *Cinema 1* p 212

24 Deleuze *Cinema 2* p 3

25 There are, of course many reasons for the predominance of child protagonists in Iranian film censorship codes relating to the depiction of women, as has been extensively discussed elsewhere, the long-standing role of the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (associated most notably with Kiarostami) the important crosscurrents between Iranian and Indian film – the impact of neorealism in Iran undoubtedly bears the influence of Satyajit Ray (especially *The Apu Trilogy* (1955–9))

Germania Anno Zero/Germany Year Zero [1947] and De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*). It is a development which will be vital for some of the most powerful open images in New Iranian Cinema and helps to explain its many child protagonists (*Where Is My Friend's House?*, *The White Balloon*, *The Apple*) in terms other than those of sentimental humanism.[25]

French new wave: the reflexive turn

The French new wave adapted much of the image repertoire created by neorealism, but gave the images a reflexive spin, an effect that can also be seen in New Iranian Cinema The French directors specialized in images of movements that falsify perspective, taking further a tendency already assumed by neorealism (and which gave rise to its disconnnected spaces). With reference to a Deleuzian analysis, two salient characteristics can be briefly noted here firstly, the 'irrational' cuts (which have disjunctive rather than conjunctive value), typified by Godard; secondly, the 'crystal image', which recurs across the French new wave films, but is best typified by Alain Resnais [26]

26 Deleuze *Cinema 2* p 248

As already mentioned, the pure optical and sound situation, instead of extending into movement, enters into relationship with a virtual image (thought, dream, memory or *déjà-vu*). A crystal image occurs when an actual optical image and a virtual image form a circuit and coalesce or exchange places [27] The most familiar instance of the crystal image is the mirror A famous example is in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) where we see Kane passing between two facing mirrors; as the mirror images recede infinitely, the actual and the virtual become indistinguishable Alternatively, the crystal image may have what Deleuze calls 'an internal disposition', like 'a seed in relation to the environment'.[28] Here the crystal image has a mise-en-abyme structure, where the seed is the virtual image crystallizing the environment ('environment' denotes both the physical landscape and the diegetic reality of the film). The paperweight that falls from the dying man's hand as he utters the word 'Rosebud' in the opening of *Citizen Kane* is an example of such a crystal image, the paperweight being the 'seed' or mise-en-abyme of the environment, Xanadu (and also the uncertain 'seed' of the story itself)

27 Ibid, p 69

28 Ibid p 71

Deleuze argues that the crystal image is the true 'genetic moment' of pure optical-sound situations, which 'are nothing but shivers of crystal-images' [29] In Resnais's film *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad/Last Year in Marienbad* (1961), the hotel (indeed the whole film) is a crystal, maze-like, mirroring infinite probabilities The film-within-a-film (characteristic of so many Godard and new wave films) is a type of crystal-image, including the film which takes its own process of making as its object – but, as Deleuze implies,

29 Ibid p 69

this work in the mirror must be 'justified from elsewhere' if it is to succeed (that is, the self-reflexivity must not be in and for itself).[30] It is no surprise therefore that the film-within-a-film should so often provide the context for open images in New Iranian Cinema (*Close-Up*, *Through the Olive Trees*, *Salaam Cinema* [Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1995], *A Moment of Innocence*). The overt reflexivity of Iranian cinema is not merely a borrowing of Brechtian devices via Godard and the French new wave, but rather something integral to its form and always 'justified from elsewhere' by the neorealist diegesis

In the following sections, we will show how Iranian cinema has developed for its own purposes elements drawn from the stylistic theories and practices discussed above, resulting in a recognizable aesthetic structured around the privileging of open images. Some of these elements correspond very closely to what we have already seen in (post)neorealism, while others develop the stylistics of the open image to a new degree, bringing into being new distinctive types. By refocusing existing debates in terms of the open image, we ensure that the cinema's 'poetic realism', so often obscured, is kept in view.

Disconnected spaces

The majority of recent Iranian films are structured by a 'quest' through a realist location. But such classical neorealist locations are stylized – naturalistic specificity of location giving way to poetic universalism Moreover, as the quest becomes a meandering circular itinerary so location breaks down into disconnected spaces: *A Taste of Cherry*, *The Wind Will Carry Us*, *The Circle*, even *The White Balloon* and *The Apple*, display variations of this process. In Kiarostami's *Where Is My Friend's House?*, schoolboy Ahmad mistakenly takes his friend Mohammad's homework book Knowing that the teacher will expel Mohammad if he does not do his homework in the correct book, Ahmad sets off to return it, although no one can tell him where Mohammad lives The quest will never be completed, Ahmad running up and down the zigzag path between villages stands for the whole structure of the film, the meandering, or indirect, journey form The film's cinematography has the effect of erasing the precise co-ordinates (the villages Koker and Poshteh in Northern Iran) and instead gives rise to disconnected spaces in which the various sensory-motor linkages begin to come apart

The way in which characters become lost in the liminal zone between disconnected spaces takes on an overtly political aspect in Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* and Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horses*. In these films the narrative is driven by its characters' attempts to cross the border between Iran and Iraq, but

31 Samira Makhmalbaf, interview
with Jahanbakhsh Nouraei *Iran
International* vol 8 no 1 (2000)
p 17

32 For the neorealist exposition, see
Giuseppe De Santis Towards an
Italian landscape in David
Overby (ed) *Springtime in Italy
a Reader on Neorealism* (London
Tantivy Press 1978) p 126

the landscape gradually dissolves into disconnected spaces· 'border'
ceases to be an identifiable, recognizable place and instead signifies a
nightmarish unstable zone of inexplicable military atrocity The idea
for *Blackboards* began with the landscape when Samira Makhmalbaf
was walking in Kurdistan with her father, she was struck by the
harsh infertility of some parts of the landscape, and selected these
for her film's location.[31] They give an overwhelming impression of
inhospitality, with red, stony, steep ascents; a hint of menace is
underscored by the film's use of offscreen sound to indicate
helicopter surveillance and border patrols. The treatment of landscape
in the film places a neorealist emphasis on the relationship between
characters and their lived-in surroundings, where characters are
'moulded' in the image of the environment.[32] The recalcitrance of the
landscape rubs off on the characters: the obdurate, weather-beaten
old patriarchs and the hardy boy smugglers. The itinerant teachers
are out of place in this landscape – and they look it, ungainly with
their blackboards, searching for pupils, when nobody wants to be
taught. As a result of this 'free indirect' relationship between
character and landscape (where the vision of the landscape is filtered
through that of the character), poetic open images are possible in
every scene But it is not only the teachers who are displaced;
eventually, as they near the border, all the Kurdish characters in the
film become 'lost', 'disconnected' from the landscape, and the
landscape itself dissolves into disconnected spaces of desolation

This disconnection is reflected in the editing of *Blackboards* as
well as in its mise-en-scene Whereas Hollywood editing ensures
spatial continuity from shot to shot, the editing in this film tends to
present a given scene as disconnected fragments of space. This, too,
highlights the instability of space, spatial disruption and
disorientation. For example, in one conversation scene (between a
teacher and an old man who asks him to read a letter), the camera
alternates from one character to the other, with each character
occupying a separate frame; but unlike the Hollywood shot/reverse-
shot structure, there is little common space from shot to shot. This
kind of spatial system is characteristic of the House of Makhmalbaf
films discussed here Instead of cutting from a spatial whole to a
part, sequences are often entirely constructed from parts, especially in
the many scenes taking place before closed (or partially-closed)
doorways Here the doorway functions as an internal frame, marking
the barrier to our vision, and emphasizing the selectiveness of what
we see. There are closeups of disembodied women's hands giving
directions, handing out soup or watering flowers (*Moment of
Innocence, The Apple*) from behind doors that are barely ajar Thus,
the disconnected spaces of Iranian cinema also gesture to concerns
about the limits of what can be shown (from a non-Iranian
perspective, it is tempting to read this allegorically as referring to
censorship restrictions)

The fixed long-shot/long-take

Both the fixed long-shot and the long-take are typical components of an aesthetic of 'stasis' as outlined by Schrader and typical vehicles for the open image. The zigzag path on the hill between villages in *Where Is My Friend's House?* is an exemplary open image. We see Ahmad's tiny figure running up and down across the hillside three times in the film, mostly in a static framing and in long shot. The distant view and length of the take in the absence of any conventional action force us to concentrate on the image and absorb the abstraction imposed on the environment. Kiarostami had the path specially built for the film (and planted a tree on the top of the hill), which reflects his concern for not just recording reality, but making it carry certain poetic resonances. Some of these are symbolic (aside from resonances specific to Persian culture, the tree on the top stands for friendship, while Ahmad's zigzagging symbolizes the hurrying-around in modern life, Kiarostami says) [33] However, the static long-shot frame and its duration give the cinematic image an openness in excess of its closed symbolism, allowing it to connect with virtual images in the mind.[34]

Kiarostami's *Through the Olive Trees* concludes with a long-take showing a young peasant, Hossein, following the girl, Tahereh, to whom he has proposed marriage The two figures wend their way through an olive orchard and along zigzag paths across a valley, finally disappearing into almost invisible dots in the distance Because of the real-time, fixed point-of-view determination of the scene, making us strain to follow the two speck-figures on a path, we scrutinize the moving image as if it were a photograph containing the sublime object, the veiled secret This is an important quality of the open image and an aspect of its residual photographic aura

As discussed earlier in relation to Schrader, in a film where every image is equally open there can be no openness, the term becomes meaningless due to the lack of distinguishing qualities and contrast This is also true of the individual image. the open image must contain a level of closure, of limitation, which enables the openness to reveal itself and, by the same token, allows the play of universality and particularity to show forth This seems to be how Kiarostami approached, technically, the universalizing of Hossein and Tahereh in the final scene of *Through the Olive Trees*: by holding the viewer in an extreme way to the image, both temporally (four minutes) and spatially (long- and wide-shot of one scene), the eventual release of interpretative desire is all the more pronounced. Kiarostami comments:

> The film-maker has carried the film up to here, and now it is given up to the audience to think about it and watch these characters from very far away I like the last shot because of its

33 Abbas Kiarostami interview with Robert Richter, *Kinder und Jugendkorrespondenz* no 42 (1990), p 24

34 David Bordwell sees Kiarostami as ironizing his own practice of using static images in the film-within-the-film of *Through the Olive Trees* gently mocking this minimalism with shots that activate angular depth and offscreen space and 'throw into relief the static planimetric images in the film that the characters are shooting David Bordwell *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press, 1997), pp 262–3

openness Until that moment social differences were dividing these two people, but as human beings they were equal. The class system separated them, but in nature and in long shot I felt that these two could get closer to their real selves, that is to their inner needs, without giving any value to the social norms [35]

35 Kiarostami interview with Nassia Hamid *Sight and Sound*, vol 7 no 2 (February 1997), p 23

In the process of becoming extra-diegetic archetypes, Hossein and Tahereh continue to be inflected with what seem to be, for Kiarostami, the three primary levels of being: the personal level of love; the social level of class difference; the existential level of nature The universalizing never loses sight of the particular.

Child's gaze

When Ahmad undertakes his quest in *Where Is My Friend's House?*, many obstacles and detours are put in his path, mostly by interfering or unhelpful adults The bewilderment of the child in the world of adults is key to the film's emotional power Kiarostami has said that the actor was chosen because of his gaze, a decision which revives the child's role as a witness in neorealism [36] One might have expected him, therefore, to exploit this by having many facial closeups expressing precisely this bafflement; but although the image of Ahmad's startled face is one we are likely to take away from the film, there are not many closeups. Instead Kiarostami prefers medium closeups, moving out to extreme long-shots, blocking direct identification with Ahmad's gaze and instead making the viewer work through a 'free indirect subjective' [37] (Pasolini) relation between the gaze of the character and a given image, between the child's gaze and the gaze of the film.

36 Kiarostami talking after the screening National Film Theatre, London 21 June 1999

37 Pasolini The cinema of poetry', pp 551–3

The most bewildering sequence in the film, both for Ahmad and for the viewer, is the wander through the narrow streets of Poshteh The set is a labyrinth, a crystalline or Riemanian space, but one which creates more anxiety than those in Italian neorealism, for here the meandering structure of the film in general, and this sequence in particular, directly confronts what Deleuze calls the child's motor-helplessness in the adult's world. The anxiety and helplessness of the child lost in the forbidding labyrinth is encapsulated in the film's title, a plea to which nobody has a proper answer. Everyday signs become mysteriously ominous a man. dwarfed and bent over by the bundle of twigs he is carrying, looks like a walking bush, brown trousers on a washing line are a false sign (Ahmad believes, mistakenly, that they belong to his friend) Ahmad stumbles from one dead-end to another, following the ambiguous and imprecise directions that denizens of the village give him; meanwhile we hear off-camera sounds – the sudden mewing of cats, a dog barking, the distant clacking of a passing train, all the more puzzling and

ambiguous for their absence in the scene. When, finally, Ahmad
encounters an old carpenter, his quest is suspended: the carpenter
takes him on a tour of the doors and windows of the village
Sensory-motor linkages in the image come utterly apart here. not
only is there no extension into action *per se*, but the scene itself
ceases to make sense Dream-like sensations descend on the viewer
as the narrative enters this extraordinary lull What takes hold instead
is optical play. teasing glimpses of kaleidoscopic projections of light
on the walls of the old houses. These, supposedly, are all cast
through windows and doors from lit interiors, but the bizarre
positioning of some of this shadow-play gives the lie to such a
rational explanation. This image of the play of light is not reducible
to realism, but is a reflexive motif on the technology that projects the
images that we see

Dedramatization/unsympathetic characters

In classical Hollywood narrative the protagonist becomes the moral
yardstick against which we measure all the other characters in a film:
he is the character with whom we most identify, and we can do this
because he is presented as sympathetic, despite his foibles. The
presence of unsympathetic characters, central to many Iranian films,
marks a divergence from the Hollywood norm but connects with a
development out of neorealism represented especially by Antonioni.
In an added self-reflexive ambiguity many of these central characters
are film directors: seemingly insensitive and aloof manipulators of
their casts – Mohsen Makhmalbaf taking this even further by
'playing himself' as the manipulative director in *Salaam Cinema* and
A Moment of Innocence This blocking of identification relates to the
muted performances Iranian directors draw from their actors,
especially from adults, an ambiguity of acting register closer to
neorealism and Rossellini than to the uniform flatness of Bresson or
Ozu, a dedramatization that creates space for the intensification of
images. In Deleuzian terms, when identification with characters does
take place. the sensory-motor arc remains intact – there is a
connection between what is seen and a motor reaction (our
identification with that character in that situation) The failure of
identification with characters snaps the sensory-motor chain, and
liberates the senses we become more receptive to other aspects of
the film In particular. it facilitates connections with virtual images
which will return in the viewer's memory

In Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the unsympathetic
central character is the film producer protagonist, Behzad, who is
insensitive and irresponsible in his attempts to exploit the rural
village he has come to film In a disturbing scene, Behzad on a
hillside kicks over a tortoise – there are some conventional reverse-

shots of the character looking down on the back of the tortoise, though it is the tortoise and its movement which is the dominant real-time image (filling the image-frame), beyond any conventional point of view or narrative requirements. Behzad loses interest and walks off but we (to our relief) see the desperate tortoise managing to right itself and continue on its way. As with similar scenes in Antonioni, a reductive explanation is possible: when Behzad kicks over the tortoise he gives expression to the way in which his individual alienation (bourgeois, urban) necessarily alienates him from existence itself (nature) Such alienation (at the three levels of personality, class and the existential) is manifest in the very arbitrariness of his cruelty and the fact that it is unthinking curiosity rather than intentional cruelty – he does not stay to extract sadistic pleasure from the upturned tortoise's plight. But Behzad is not hero, villain or victim; identification with him and his act remains disconnected, open, as does the image of the tortoise – obsessively framed in excess of the narrative requirement – or to put it in Pasolini's terms, a poetic image infuses a prosaic narrative with its ambiguity

Open image/crystal image

Open images are a feature of film endings, closing scenes which try not to close down a narrative but rather open it out to the viewer's consideration, to 'live on' after the film itself has finished. A striking example is in Kiarostami's *A Taste of Cherry*, where the central character, Mr Badiei, plans to commit suicide in the evening, but must find someone who will come the following morning to bury him Towards the end of the film Badiei takes an overdose and lies down in his self-dug grave. The screen goes completely black for a few seconds Suddenly the film cuts from darkness to light, from film to grainy video stock. Characters that we saw earlier are now seen waiting around, like actors on a film set, while motifs from the film (marching soldiers counting in unison) are repeated verite-style.

This change to grainy video stock to give a verite effect is a common feature of New Iranian Cinema. An early example is Kiarostami's use of video for the real trial scene of the 'fake Makhmalbaf' case in *Close-Up*. In *A Taste of Cherry* the documentary effect is subverted. The verite coda does not assert, in Brechtian fashion, that the foregoing film is just a representation, because the fuzzy imaging of the video reality seems far stranger than the tangible diegetic reality of the preceding narrative, instead, the intrusion of this uncanny real marks a shift to the poetic. The switch from night and death to day and life, far from resolving the narrative, creates an ambiguity, an openness, as if we are now watching images of life after death – whether or not our central

character actually died or not Following the blacked-out image, the temporal relation between the coda and the preceding narrative is thrown into confusion, as is the relation between diegesis and meta-diegetic documentary. The coda – evoking dream or *déjà-vu* – is not a recollection or flashback but a merging or short-circuiting of past and present, forming a crystal image.

While *A Taste of Cherry* ends with 'documentary' in video, Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* uses videocam for its documentary beginning, thus setting up the whole film as a Deleuzian crystal image The film follows the adventures of two girls who have spent most of their lives locked up at home under their father's watchful eye. The first image shows an outstretched hand watering a plant. This shot documents the everyday, yet makes it abstract – the stationary camera waits for the hand to enter the frame. The shot composition is austere, almost abstract – flat, with the camera axis perpendicular to the background It is a form of abstraction which does not remove the everyday, but opens it into dimensions other than the everyday. It raises possible symbolic meanings relating to the narrative – the plant is in the open, receiving the sun, unlike the housebound girls Yet the image resists any one-to-one correspondence between the sign and meaning.

The story for *The Apple* is taken straight from Tehran television news, and uses the family members concerned to act as themselves – but the director introduces significant props, such as the dangling apple and mirror, into her reimagining of the events Several open images in this film come from scenes which make use of these symbolic props. This is because their intrusion into the reconstruction of events that took place in actuality only a few days before produces an uncanny effect; the irreducible quality alluded to above never vanishes Makhmalbaf began filming even as the events were happening – her documentary section, using video, shows the girls at the welfare centre while the reconstruction of the girls' release into the outside world started only four days after it happened. As a result, the whole film becomes a crystal image, but one in which the work in the mirror is put in the scene in a peculiarly uncanny fashion, for not only are the symbolic props a constant reminder that this is a fictional reconstruction, but they directly materialize the twins' process of coming to terms with the outside world They, like the film, examine themselves in the mirror (given to them as a present by the social worker). Even the apple, which is such an overdetermined symbol in the Judaeo-Islamic-Christian cultural inheritance, becomes detached from those particular moorings to configure the twins' curiosity about the world.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *A Moment of Innocence*, a film which films itself in the process of its own constitution, contains particularly intricate crystalline open images. Makhmalbaf plays himself as the (unsympathetic) director of a film which looks reflexively at his own

past – and might be said to reconstitute that past For there is a significant disparity between the past as it happened and the past which is recollected in the film. In the former, Makhmalbaf, an Islamic revolutionary, aged seventeen, tried to disarm one of the Shah's policemen, was shot by him, and subsequently imprisoned in a Pahlavi jail. By contrast, the film (made long after Makhmalbaf renounced his revolutionary fervour) represents the policeman as a sensitive man, in love with a mysterious woman who seemed to ask him for the time, or for directions, at every opportunity It also tells us that this woman was Makhmalbaf's cousin and accomplice (whose flirtation is merely to distract the policeman while Makhmalbaf stabs him with a knife), the two revolutionaries are in love with each other, and together they want to save the world using any means – including violence In the film's reconstruction of history, the ideal of saving the world through love is contrasted with the means of violence – this is the version that the youngsters are asked to reenact, but their failure to reenact this version introduces yet another alternative (nonviolent) reality, which calls into question Makhmalbaf's attempt to reconstitute – and manipulate – the past The young actors do not wish to take up arms against each other – the 'Young Makhmalbaf' repeatedly sobs and throws away the knife that he has been directed to thrust into the policeman's side. The 'Young Policeman' refuses to draw his gun In the climax of the film-within-a-film, the 'Policeman', on impulse, offers the woman the flower which he had been instructed not to give her, and 'Makhmalbaf' in turn donates to the policeman the flatbread under which he was supposed to conceal the knife, the film closes with this image of exchange, the veiled woman caught in between, arrested in a freeze-frame.

The fusion of reality and its poetic remake in *A Moment of Innocence* develops into a very complex crystal image, in which no component is entirely independent from any other – this has the antirealist consequence that characters who have never met before act as if they knew each other intimately For all the film's intricate design, the components in the film do not just slot neatly inside each other – they open onto each other, overlapping. In this respect the film, like so many Iranian films (*The Circle*, *The Wind Will Carry Us*, *A Taste of Cherry*), structurally resembles the musical round – which, according to Deleuze, is an instance of a crystal – with its rhythmically-modulated repetitions. In *A Moment of Innocence*, the first scene of the policeman strand ends when a woman happens to come by and asks him the time 'It happened just like that!' exclaims the policeman as she walks away. We then cut to the Makhmalbaf strand, where the part of the cousin is allocated to the young actor's own cousin. When, finally alone, she calls into a shop where the clocks have all stopped, then walks towards the rehearsing policemen, the encounter we saw before is repeated. This time we

recognize the woman, and realize that the two scenes/strands have not been taking place in sequence (which is how we have experienced them), but simultaneously. The narrative then takes up the policeman strand from exactly where it was left before, but the repetition has underlined the words 'It happened just like that!' with a new ambiguity.

There are political implications in this use of the crystal image as a round, which, Deleuze writes, describes 'the rising and falling back of pasts which are preserved.'[38] As the round progresses, more and more alternative realities are negotiated and put into contact with the past 'as it happened'; the actual images are made to confront virtual images, generating multiple fictional possibilities. As such, *Moment of Innocence* utilizes the properties of the open image (crystalline ambiguity, indeterminacy) in a way that subtly undermines the Islamic regime itself. That regime, which temporarily banned the film, states that there is only one reality, but even in the one, the film points out, there are many.[39] The shop where the clocks are frozen signals the arrest of linear time, the severing of sensory-motor links, and the release of subjective possibilities.

38 Deleuze *Cinema 2,* p 93

39 The religious underpinning of these images referred to earlier does not in our view compromise their dissident potential That religious underpinning is not synonymous with state religion or any other hegemonic versions of reality

Freeze-frame

The freeze-frame which ends *Moment of Innocence* suspends within its single image the competing determinants of Islamic fundamentalism, revolutionary idealism, terrorism, law and order, adolescent romance, unrequited love, revenge and pacifism. The freeze-frame 'arrests' the precise 'moment' where history and its attempted re-enactment interpenetrate – that is, the past (the original terrorist act of the young Makhmalbaf and accomplice) is transfigured by the present (the actors' refusal to repeat the original violent act) The original terrorists' act, the original lovelorn policeman's naive response, the actors' spontaneous refusal of violence, and the middle-aged protagonists' witnessing of this refusal in the re-enactment, are no longer separate moments in time but all joined to constitute the moment of innocence. Although there is a synthesis of past and present and of the competing ideologies in this moment, this image, there is no resolution, no closure. Instead the viewer is left to read the freeze-frame tableau and the contradictions held within it as an open image

It might be argued that the tendency towards the allegorical evident in New Iranian Cinema pulls the films' open images towards narrative determinism. *The Apple,* for instance, can be read in terms of feminist allegory In the concluding scene, the blind, chadored mother wanders out of the house, into the alleyway, and reaches for the dangling apple The final shot freezes her with the apple firmly in her grasp (an allegory about women seizing opportunities) The

imprisonment of the girls may be a code, enabling the film to pass the censor, for the restrictions imposed on women in Iran Nonetheless, neither the allegorical-symbolic nor the documentary elements/codes have hegemony, and the closing freeze-frame of *The Apple* is an open image in that it 'suspends' interpretation between competing narrative codes.

A groundbreaking Iranian film in terms of popular (commercial) international success was Panahi's *The White Balloon*. This is the story of a seven-year-old girl, Razieh, meandering around a few Tehran streets, on her way to buy a goldfish for New Year, and losing her money It displays all the characteristics we have come to expect – a play with real-time duration, natural locations, a repetitive, cyclical structure, and a child protagonist on a quest. Because of its popularity in the West, critics – inside and outside Iran – have taken issue with the film, alleging that it does not reflect Iranian political reality (claiming that it provides propaganda for western audiences instead) This often bitter debate has been replayed with almost every subsequent Iranian film (more recently, critics have been charging that the films are too negative) In terms of our classification of the open image, *The White Balloon* suggests that even in a film that appears to be completely apolitical, there is in fact a political aspect, and this relates to the forms we have been discussing. At the end of the film Razieh and her older brother, Ali, recover their 500-toman banknote with help from an Afghan balloon seller. Razieh and Ali then, without thought, abandon their saviour, buy the goldfish and return home. The film ends with the clock ticking down to the New Year, an ominous offscreen explosion, and a freeze-frame: the Afghan refugee boy with his white balloon

The Afghan boy is in every sense 'marginal' to the narrative – this is, of course, the point He has barely figured in the film, neither has the white balloon. And, one might add, neither have the Iranian political situation nor the question of Afghan refugees in Iran. Yet *The White Balloon* is the title of the film and this is the final image – one that, by its very unexpectedness and the fact that it is a long-held freeze-frame, announces itself as the crucial image of the film, a static image we are given the necessary time to 'read'. Identification with (the now unsympathetic) Razieh's quest is called into question: the implication is that the Afghan refugee will not be going home to celebrate the New Year – he has no home But the image is too ambiguous, too 'strong', to be reduced to one level of interpretation. The freeze-frame of the Afghan boy and his white balloon feeds back into and modifies the whole preceding 'charming' narrative, the entire chain of images. The best open images 'open up' the films in which they appear (turn the films into crystal images) and open films 'out' to the world, rendering the absent political reality present.

We would not argue that ambiguity or indeterminacy are inherently radical – indeterminacy can itself be politically determined

in opposing ways – but that Iranian filmmakers have utilized the open image to circumvent a particularly strict form of censorship and point to the plurality of truth and experience in a political context where a repressive notion of one truth is imposed by the state. The dogmatic constructions of reality associated with the Iranian state have, of course, their equivalents elsewhere. The appeal of New Iranian Cinema in the West may have less to do with 'sympathy' for an exoticized 'other' under conditions of repression than with self-recognition. The open images of Iranian film remind us of the loss of such images in most contemporary cinema, the loss of cinema's particular space for creative interpretation and critical reflection

Terminal replay: Resnais revisited in Chris Marker's *Level Five*

CATHERINE LUPTON

Okinawa, mon amour

In Chris Marker's most recent feature film, *Level Five* (1997), the character known as Laura seeks a way to describe her feeling of identification with the suffering of the population of Okinawa in 1945. Okinawa, largest of the Ryukyu Islands annexed by Japan in 1875, and legendary for the pacifism and gentleness of its inhabitants, became the site of the last and most savage battle of World War II In April 1945, US forces invaded the island in the final stages of the Pacific campaign. During the ensuing three-month battle, both the US and the Japanese armies suffered massive casualties (with Japanese losses being significantly higher), yet Japan refused to surrender. This decision directly precipitated the use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Apart from the military death toll, one third of the island's civilian population (approximately 150,000 individuals) perished as a consequence of the battle, most pressured by the 'never surrender' ethos of the Japanese Imperial Army to kill themselves and the members of their own family rather than be captured alive by the enemy.

Laura, a woman who is 'happy and in love with life', is also chosen to encounter death, through the loss of her lover, whose unfinished computer game about the Battle of Okinawa she is trying to complete. Laura reflects that what she shares with Okinawa is the experience of a tragedy that is both unique and intimate, yet also banal so easy to name after a song or a film that the title she suggests – 'Okinawa, mon amour' – may well have occurred to the viewer even before she says it

1   Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier,
    How history begets meaning
    Alain Resnais *Hiroshima mon
    amour* (1959)' in Susan Hayward
    and Ginette Vincendeau (eds)
    French Film Texts and Contexts
    (London Routledge, 1990)
    p 173
2   Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of
    Loss the National Past in
    Postwar French Cinema*
    (Princeton NJ Princeton
    University Press, 1999), pp 31–2
    Greene refers to writings on
    Resnais by Serge Daney Gilles
    Deleuze and René Prédal

3   In the UK the sixtieth
    anniversary commemorations in
    2000 of the Dunkirk evacuation
    the David Irving libel trial and
    the opening of the Holocaust
    exhibit at London s Imperial War
    Museum are some recent
    manifestations of the activities
    and anxieties that are
    symptomatic of this shift
4   Ropars-Wuilleumier, How history
    begets meaning, pp 173–8

5   The term *dispositif* which has no
    ready equivalent in English
    indicates the way that a given
    medium invites certain positions
    and attitudes of reception
6   Raymond Bellour in a lecture
    entitled L'Entre-image
    aujourd'hui multiple cinemas –
    the cinema only, delivered at
    Tate Modern London 23 May
    2002

Level Five's allusion to Alain Resnais's celebrated film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), in this moment of naming and via the shared device of a double narrative that links the private trauma of a Frenchwoman with appalling events in Japan's wartime past, also marks a return to what Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier has so precisely analyzed as the achievement and the transgression of the earlier film the inscription of a cinematic text 'which simultaneously tells an easily understandable story and interposes between that story and its perception a screen of multiple signs resistant to narrativity' [1] Marker's homage confirms the continuing relevance of *Hiroshima*'s modernist take on the ambiguities of historical representation, but also registers what has changed, in both historical context and the textual and technological potential of cinema, in the forty-odd years that separate the two films. If, as Naomi Greene and others have argued,[2] Resnais's films are infused with the paralyzing traumas of those who lived through World War II and address the problem of how to translate that experience into representation, *Level Five* confronts the gap in time and knowledge between the survivors of Okinawa and those who learn about it afterwards This acknowledgement of historical distance between past and present registers a contemporary shift in cultural perceptions of World War II at a moment when the fragile burden of remembrance is palpably shifting from survivors to public museums, archives, recordings and broadcasts.[3] As a key text of the French new wave, *Hiroshima mon amour* heralded a new kind of, and awareness of, cinematic modernism, foregrounding cinema's conventional codes by exploding them, opening them to contamination by literature on the one hand and reality on the other [4] *Level Five* carries out its own explosion and contamination of cinema's material and conventions, in being a film (perhaps even the first film) that is explicitly of and about the digital media revolution and its implications for historical representation Raymond Bellour recently heralded *Level Five* as a new kind of film in its evaluation of the links between memory and the production of images and sounds via computer. Bellour suggested that the startling proximity of Laura in the film, her uncomfortable closeness to the viewer and the directness of her address (features to which this essay will return), result partly from the fact that, although released as a 35mm theatrical feature film, *Level Five* adopts the *dispositif*[5] of a computer user working (interacting) with her machine in a confined workspace, rather than the relations of distance, reverence and voyeuristic identification traditionally set up by the cinematic apparatus.[6]

Beyond the narratable interest of these comparative features, *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Level Five* also share the troubling force of a transgression that each commits in its own way: a breaching not only of formal and generic boundaries, but of proprieties governing the representation of the historical events to which they refer

7 Marguerite Duras *Hiroshima mon amour* (Paris Editions Gallimard 1960), pp 2–3

8 Dolores Walfisch, interview with Chris Marker *Vertigo*, vol 7 (Autumn 1997) p 38

Marguerite Duras famously called *Hiroshima mon amour* a sacrilege for its invocation of the atomic devastation through the melodramatic device of a casual affair between a Japanese man and a French woman.[7] In inventing Laura as an intercessor between the viewer and the revelation of Okinawa's past in *Level Five*, Marker admits to gambling with the potential of audience identification.[8] Laura's candid exhibition of personal grief may be designed to draw the sympathy and understanding of the spectator towards Okinawa's past, and to demonstrate the uniqueness and incommensurability of the two human tragedies, but it is difficult to avoid feeling that there is something unseemly about her willingness to compare her suffering to that of the Okinawan people. *Level Five*'s 'sacrilege' revisits *Hiroshima's* illicit conjunction of tragedy and banality, and in so doing reaches into the heart of contemporary anxieties about the place and significance of historical memory in a media-saturated culture.

Twofold tales

Ropars-Wuilleumier's reading of *Hiroshima mon amour* centres on paradox and ambiguity in the film's inscription. *Hiroshima* achieves a narrative – the causal and logical explanation by the actress (and the clarifying progression of shots) of what happened to her in Nevers during the war – but only through the mobilization of traces (objects, names, disconnected image-fragments) that point irrevocably towards what they cannot represent The cinematic construction of the film rests on techniques that commonly signify rupture and intransitivity: elliptical and fragmented editing, the separation of sound and image, the failure to distinguish between subjective and objective viewpoints, the open ending, the absence of a metanarrative that consequently forces the spectator to undergo the same process of transference as the actress.[9] These techniques are augmented by the intertextual multiplication of codes, notably in the array of found footage in the prologue that juxtaposes lurid fictional reconstructions of the atomic attacks with scientific and documentary evidence of Hiroshima – the sober institutional discourses of the hospital and the museum shaping the orderly display of victims and artefacts. These differing and conflicting filmic registers may be read as foregrounding the 'expulsion of the historical event'[10] behind interposed screens of competing representations. Although Ropars-Wuilleumier argues that the movement of the film is towards a transference from the 'unrepresentable' of Hiroshima to the 'narratable' of Nevers, she contends that 'The itinerary which inscribes Hiroshima into a story remains reversible although circumscribed. the fragmentation of the editing can always let filter through, under the known and named present. the resurgence of the

9 Ropars-Wuilleumier How history begets meaning p 182

10 Ibid

11 Ibid p 181 It is worth noting
that Ropars-Wuilleumier slips in
her interpretation between the
unnameable' of *écriture* – the
non-signifying drive of
enunciation itself that erupts into
the text – and the
unrepresentable of traumatic
historical events such as the
atomic destruction of Hiroshima
without acknowledging the
distinction between them
Resnais s film also touches
significantly upon repressed
aspects of France s wartime past,
notably the fate of women
subjected to head-shaving during
the Liberation for alleged
'horizontal collaboration with the
enemy See Greene *Landscapes
of Loss*, pp 42–6

12 Ibid p 175 The additional
material for the script forms the
appendices of Duras *Hiroshima
mon amour* pp 107ff

13 See Roy Armes, *French Cinema
Since 1946 Volume Two the
Personal Style* (London/New York
Tantivy Press/A S Barnes 1966),
p 126

unnameable that the writing has focused on the name Hiroshima. and where the film is dispersed.'[11] This dispersal is reinforced by the ambiguous tone of the open ending, which functions simultaneously as the successful completion of the transference and a reminder of all that is repressed and displaced in the act of naming It extends too through the literary 'contamination' of the film that Ropars-Wuilleumier discusses: what she calls the 'subterranean continuity' of the character sketches and possible outcomes that Resnais asked Duras to write alongside the dialogue. and which. even though they do not feature in the finished film, nonetheless intervene to trouble its internal continuity (and are included in the published version of the script).[12] The dispersal of the film's meaning is further augmented by Resnais's famous assertion that the actress's recollections might be entirely made up, and the spectator is not obliged to believe her [13]

Level Five revisits the textual ambiguity of *Hiroshima mon amour*, but by switching the threads of its double narrative In Resnais's film, it is the actress's personal story which becomes 'tellable', while the weight carried by the name Hiroshima exceeds the capacity of narration to contain it. In *Level Five*. where the film's project is to make visible a history that has been obscured by this same loaded name. it is the documentary account of the Battle of Okinawa that becomes the subject of a narrative, while Laura progressively destabilizes. becoming more, rather than less, traumatized *Hiroshima*'s introduction of an isolated flashback (the sudden shot of the actress's dead German lover). which only later assumes its place in a pattern of causal explanation, is repeated in *Level Five* by the early appearance of Kinjo Shigeaki, who only later is revealed as the object of Laura's search and – as one who recounts the act of murdering his own mother and younger siblings rather than allowing them to fall into the hands of the Americans – the key witness to the destruction of Okinawa's civilian population.

Marker deploys his own elaborate versions of textual multiplicity and intransigence a fondness for lateral digressions into humorous anecdote and parable, the insistent working of images through the screens of digital manipulation and mediation (very little of the footage in *Level Five* appears without at some point being digitally treated or framed in a computer monitor). and the elaborate fictional conceits of Laura, her dead lover and her editor friend Chris These elements and motifs are recognizable features of Marker's previous work. *Sans Soleil/Sunless* (1982), is a text of digression which traverses Japan. Africa, France, Iceland and the USA in a moving and humorous meditation on the enigma of remembering, narrated as a series of letters sent by a fictional film cameraman to an anonymous woman who reads from and comments upon them It includes a sequence devoted to the Battle of Okinawa that anticipates *Level Five*'s more detailed investigation of this episode from Japan's wartime past *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre/The Last Bolshevik* (1993), a

two-part video work for television, takes the life and work of Marker's friend, the Soviet director Alexander Medvedkin, as an occasion to examine the twists and turns of Russian and Soviet history over the fortuitously-timed span of Medvedkin's life (1900–89). It incorporates a number of amusing and instructive parables on the confusion of history and representation – one of the most vivid being the revelation that an apparently authentic photograph of the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917 (used and credited as such on the front cover of a French edition of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*), was actually lifted from a filmed re-enactment of the event staged in 1920. Laura in *Level Five* relishes similar anecdotes: the re-enacted flag-raising on Iwo Jima which became an international icon, and the all-purpose burning man, nicknamed Gustav by film editors, who cropped up in wartime newsreels from all over the Pacific. *The Last Bolshevik* also plays off different layers of media representation in the striking device, repeated to great effect in *Level Five*, of filming interview subjects next to a television monitor on which another sequence of the film is playing.

Such techniques function as the 'screen of multiple signs resistant to narrativity', the circular, labyrinthine movements which in *Level Five* de-route and embroider the linear, chronological and revelatory account of the Battle of Okinawa. Yet they lack the force of rupture and contamination at work in *Hiroshima mon amour*, operating rather as play and dissimulation that do not so much resist narrativity as ensure that it is carried out by other means. The point at which *Level Five* does break apart is its end, with the distressing spectacle of Laura's final disintegration and disappearance (mental, physical and visual – as she dissolves the focus of her own recorded image) The empty space of her workroom opens onto the 'other space' in which the narrative closure of the film is put into reverse, and the price of accepting the past as it happened is revealed as not the fulfillment, but the eradication of the subject

Architects of memory

The ending of *Level Five* recalls that of Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), in which the man 'marked by an image from his childhood', finds that the memory that has haunted him is in fact that of the moment of his own death. This recollection introduces a third term, memory, into the encounter of history and representation considered thus far. The introduction of memory enables both *Level Five* and *Hiroshima mon amour* to be read anew: not simply as texts which enunciate the paradox of representing the past, but as films about different orders of remembering. Seen in this light, the fictional armatures created for both films function as indicators of memory already at work

transforming histories into stories On a personal level, the therapeutic narrative of *Hiroshima*'s actress. who is finally able to turn the trauma of her wartime experiences into a story that can be told, finds affinity with Kinjo Shigeaki's testimony, which he explicitly offers as an experience that can be shared to help others, inspired by his Christian beliefs and role as a minister of the church. Both films also consider the spaces of public, collective memory in their attention to museums and commemorative sites Marker is as interested in how people behave in such places as in what they exhibit. *Level Five* frames the attentive, solemn faces of visitors to the battle sites on Okinawa Other faces which appear are those of the grieving Okinawan parents whose children drowned during their evacuation from the island before the Battle, in a sequence borrowed from Nagisa Oshima's *Shisha wa itsuma demo wakai – Okinawa gaku-do sokai-sen no higeki/The Dead Remain Young* (1977). Oshima's documentary chronicles the annual pilgrimage made by the parents to the site where the ship carrying their children was torpedoed, to offer ritual prayers to the dead and cast gifts of *sake*, food and flowers into the water. (Later in *Level Five*, Laura conducts an imaginary dialogue with a future ethnographer on the late twentieth-century's rites of interaction with computers. a rather awkward attempt at unsettling a gaze that might rest too comfortably on the 'exotic' ritual behaviour of others.)

The discontinuous signs and traces embedded in the two films, such as the tourist itinerary of sights in Hiroshima in 1958, which is matched by *Level Five*'s montage of everyday signs found in present-day Nara (the principal city of Okinawa), may designate sites of historical repression – the 'general amnesia' mentioned by the disembodied voice of Chris – but they also operate as mnemonic devices that trigger the activation of memory. It is in this sense that Michael Roth interprets the opening lines of *Hiroshima mon amour*, ('He· You saw nothing in Hiroshima/She I saw everything. *Everything*'), not as evidence of the actress's mistake in thinking she has grasped the past in its entirety through the visual evidence of museums and newsreels, but as the affirmation that she has indeed seen everything she needs to see about the operation of remembering.[14] Roth's argument pinpoints the limits of reading Resnais's film (and by implication Marker's) in terms of the paradox of historical representation Once established, it too easily becomes a closed circuit that may be repeated endlessly as an injunction about the impossibility of representing the past, but never passed beyond Restoring the transformative work of memory to the equation enables a more progressive reading of how these films go about representing past events.

The proposition that *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Level Five* are texts *about* different orders of remembering implies the existence in each of a meta-discourse that assumes responsibility for narrating and

14 Michael S Roth *Hiroshima mon amour* you must remember this in Robert A Rosenstone (ed) *Revisioning History Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton NJ Princeton University Press, 1995) pp 91–101

15 Mentioned in Ropars
Wuilleumier How history begets
meaning p 178

organizing the various memory-processes. Yet the possibility arises that there is no meta-discourse other than memory itself. Gilles Deleuze characterized Resnais's cinema as a memory-world or brain:[15] an extending map of subjective thought-patterns Resnais's films frequently inscribe architectural space as their equivalent of interior processes of recollection, crucially omitting any distinction between subjective and objective points of view. Towards the end of *Hiroshima mon amour*, the actress's nocturnal wanderings give way to extended tracking shots of the empty Hiroshima streets intercut with those of Nevers, and it is not established whether the footage is intended to represent her reveries, an 'objective' insert, or an abstract process of reflection that has no subject *L'Année dernière à Marienbad/Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) features ominously echoing baroque hotel corridors, ballrooms and bedrooms as the setting for bizarrely discontinuous events that may only make sense as the subjective perceptions and recollections of the central male character but are never explicitly signalled as such Resnais's familiar forward tracking shots through architectural space, which feature not only in *Marienbad* and *Hiroshima* but also shape the filming of Auschwitz in *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog* (1956) and of the French Bibliothèque Nationale in *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1957), create a compelling visual analogy for the labyrinthine movements of memory and investigation. A rather different mapping of subjective onto architectural space occurs in *Muriel, ou le temps d'un rétour/Muriel* (1963) where Hélène's improvised apartment, cluttered with unsold antique furniture from her business, seems to mirror the mental state of a character who has fabricated an unsustainable version of her own past.

'I remember January in Tokyo, or rather I remember the images which I filmed of January in Tokyo Now they have substituted themselves for my memory, they *are* my memory ' These often-quoted lines from *Sans Soleil* indicate Chris Marker's refusal to separate memories from the images and media in which they are manifested. Marker's famous unwillingness to create a public identity for himself outside his work, and the compulsive focus of that work upon memory processes which are simultaneously private and historical, further reinforce the absence of recourse to any exterior explanation beyond the 'memory-work' itself [16]

16 The term memory-work is
borrowed from Annette Kuhn
Family Secrets (London Verso,
1995) She uses it to describe
precisely those works that
assume the form of memory in
dealing with memory and are
characterized by fragmentation,
ellipsis and digression and the
absence of conventional
distinctions between the public
and the private spheres

If Resnais uses literal architectural space as a means of mapping interior thought and recollection. Marker's equivalent memory-worlds are the technological spaces afforded by different visual media photography. film. video. and increasingly the 'virtual architectures' of cyberspace and digital hypermedia. Marker's introduction to his CD-Rom. *Immemory* (1998). underscores the longevity of spatial ordering as a mnemonic prompt, notably in the practice of the 'art of memory' which flourished in classical, mediaeval and Renaissance Europe In this context. Resnais's architectures acquire a longer

17 Chris Marker, introductory text
for *Immemory* [CD-Rom] (Paris
Centre Georges Pompidou, 1998)

heritage and the step from literal to virtual architecture seems a
comparatively small one.[17] In *Level Five* it is the Optional World
Link (OWL) computer network that operates as the memory-process,
permitting access to all information networks and databases on the
planet (past, present and future) and apparently allowing users to
connect their central nervous systems directly into the computer
network – a borrowing of William Gibson's cyberpunk fantasy of
'jacking-in'. Technological mediation of human memory (the
manifestation of memory in technology), is further designated by the
viewer's awareness that Laura does not appear directly, but through
the medium of her recorded video diary, which, at the end of the
film, is arguably revealed to have been organized retrospectively – it
has already been recorded before the action of the film unfolds.[18]

18 Ian Hunt's essay 'Okinawa
replay Chris Marker's *Level Five
Coil*, no 5 (1997) n p helpfully
clarifies this retrospective reading
of Laura's diary

What is so striking about Marker's engagement with new digital
media technologies, in the context of his ongoing obsession with the
function of memory, is that it explodes the assumed incompatibility
of new media and memory that has become a prevalent feature of
contemporary cultural thinking (both popular and academic) Andreas
Huyssen's book *Twilight Memories* encapsulates an attitude that sees
current cultural preoccupations with memory as a defence mechanism
(what he calls a 'reaction formation'), against a crisis of temporality
brought about by the ever-accelerating pace of technological change,
and what he perceives as the insidious tendency of the new media to
make all the information that they process functionally equivalent.
For Huyssen, memory

> represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to
> resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to
> recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of
> simulation and fast-speed information cable networks, to claim
> some anchoring space in a work of puzzling and often threatening
> heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload.[19]

19 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight
Memories Marking Time in a
Culture of Amnesia* (New York
and London Routledge 1995)
p 7

It is notable that he studiously confines the privileged sites of
memory to traditional cultural spaces and artistic practices – the
museum and its artefacts, painting, literature and to some extent film
– foreclosing the possibility that the new media might also be able to
contribute to the activation, as opposed to the erasure, of historical
remembrance

Marker's works have never entertained the 'crisis of the subject'
attributed to the rate and scope of global technological change since
the 1960s, because they assume from the outset a post-Cartesian
subject who is already dispersed across other texts, habitually
speaking through the words and images of others ('I think, therefore
I'm someone else'), and fractured by the ways in which the
progression of time and memory insistently recreate the self This
fracturing is characteristically expressed in Marker's work by
addressing past selves in the second or third person,[20] and creating

20 He offers a modest justification
of this habit in Chapter 3 of his
book *Le Dépays* (Paris Éditions
Herscher 1982) n p

multiple fictional *alter-egos*. From this perspective, the subject is already inscribed in devices, or technologies, that become the condition, rather than the opponent, of memory. Marker reverses Huyssen's assumption that old technologies are 'better for remembering' than new ones, asserting that the CD-Rom has allowed him to achieve a much better approximation of the 'geography' of his own memory than earlier attempts,[21] which include *Sans Soleil*, the photo-film *Si j'avais quatre dromedaires/If I Had Four Camels* (1966), and the multimedia installation *Zapping Zone* (1990). Even the visual distortion of memory-images as a consequence of technological mediation becomes a virtue in Marker's scheme In *Sans Soleil*, photographs and film footage are fed into a synthesizer that transforms them into shifting patterns of vivid pixellated colour. The resulting digital images are celebrated as tangible signs of the way that memory itself transforms and distorts the past· 'they proclaim themselves to be what they are images, not the mobile and compact form of an already inaccessible past'[22] For Marker, technology works as memory, and in consequence assumes human attributes Returning to *Level Five*, it is the design of the computer game that preserves the moral imperative of facing up to the past as it happened, by preventing Laura from rewriting the history of the Battle of Okinawa to ensure a positive outcome

21 Marker introductory text for *Immemory*

22 English commentary for *Sans Soleil*

The snares of time

The interpretation developed so far implies that memory saturates both Marker's and Resnais's work, as an affirmative process and presence Yet it too, like the closed paradox of history and representation, is revealed by counter-tensions in the films under discussion to be inadequate. Roth's reading of *Hiroshima mon amour* as the triumph of history over trauma reaches its own limit as it is only achieved by repressing the 'unnameable' that remains such an insistent pressure within the film· the subterranean murmur of other possible and more disquieting outcomes, of events that remain deeply traumatic and impervious to narrative recuperation Ropars-Wuilleumier suggests that it is the influence of Duras that breaks Resnais's memory-world open, to an infinite regression of signs which obliterate memory's object.[23] Yet the evidence of Resnais's other contemporary films reveals the progress of memory wrong-footed at every turn. *Night and Fog* remains instructive for the way it simultaneously achieves and blocks a memory of the Holocaust, with Jean Cayrol's commentary famously insisting that the images which appear are only 'the shell, the shadow'[24] of the reality of the death camps. *Last Year in Marienbad*, with its constantly mutating mise-en-scene. and endless discrepancies between soundtrack and image. offers precious little certainty to the remembering subject,

23 Ropars-Wuilleumier How history begets meaning' p 178

24 English commentary quoted in Greene *Landscapes of Loss*, p 34

25 Ibid p 42

26 Marker's commitment to such
counter-history is an insistent
theme in many of his films
surfacing explicitly in *Sans Soleil*,
*Le fond de l'air est rouge/A Grin
Without a Cat* (1977/93) and *The
Last Bolshevik*
27 In *Sans Soleil* and also explored
in Chris Marker, A free replay
(notes sur *Vertigo*) *Positif* no
400 (June 1994), pp 79–84
English translation in John
Boorman and Walter Donohue
(eds), *Projections 4½* (London
Faber 1995)

while *Toute la mémoire du monde*, as Naomi Greene argues, reveals the pursuit of knowledge to be a suffocating trap.[25]

The lure of memory as a death-trap is what ultimately fascinates Marker His works probe the compulsion to remember, and fully understand its necessity to both the private creation of individual identity, and the political process of challenging the ideological erasure and rewriting of history by those in power.[26] Yet he perpetually returns to the spectre of 'insane memory' the memory that annihilates itself in the effort to arrest and replay time, the memory that cannot but falsify its object because the return to the past is an impossibility This is the memory form which he finds most perfectly expressed in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)[27] Marker's recognition that the subject is fractured in the act of remembering (you are a different person from the one you remember being) gives rise to a hypothetical logic of doubles who (mirroring traditional legends of the *Doppelganger*) destroy each other if their discontinuous times are superimposed. Hence the death of the two Madeleines in *Vertigo*, the demise of the hero in *La Jetée*, when he returns to the memory of his own death, and the obliteration of Laura in *Level Five*, after she comes face-to-face with her own image in the online Gallery of Masks If *Hiroshima mon amour* anticipates this understanding (the actress addresses her past self in the third person when she 'gives her up to forgetting'), it more firmly establishes the necessity of forgetting, of maintaining the distance between past and present as the condition for overcoming trauma – even though forgetting remains a lingering outrage In *Level Five*, the self-preserving capacity to forget seems more fragile, and somehow less appealing, than the pull of insane memory.

Faraway, too close

If *Level Five* commits a sacrilege in respect of the historical past, its transgression seems to be connected to proximity a lack of 'proper' distance Echoing the feeling described earlier that there is something unseemly in Laura's comparison of her own tragedy with that of Okinawa, Ian Hunt remarks of *Level Five* that 'The film has a terrific force of embarrassment in the directness of its address to the viewer'[28] – suggesting that the awkwardness arises not just from what Laura does, but the fact that she makes such a candid confession of it to the audience Bellour's comments on the unexpectedly intimate *dispositif* of *Level Five* have some bearing here, but it is also possible to pinpoint what seems culturally inappropriate about Laura's response. She appears to have committed the cardinal sin of a media-saturated society, which believes it can understand and empathize with the past because it can access and coopt so many of its images. The historical distance between *Level*

28 Hunt Okinawa reply n p

29 Ibid

30 Ibid

31 The epigraph to *The Last Bolshevik* is George Steiner's remark It is not the literal past that rules us it is images of the past'

32 Greene *Landscapes of Loss* p 32 p 200 fn 6

Five and *Hiroshima mon amour* here becomes pertinent The histories of Nevers and Hiroshima are able to communicate, even through the screen of disparate signs and representations, insofar as both enounce traumatic lived experiences from the same war. *Level Five* deals more overtly with the mediation and misunderstanding of Okinawa's history, and also explicitly confronts the status of those who did not live through the Battle, but seek to know of it afterwards – those whom Hunt refers to as 'latecomers' Yet the fact that one such latecomer, Kenji Tokimitsu, is classified in the computer files as a 'witness', prompts Hunt to a counter-reading of Laura's identification with Okinawa, which puts the assumed reflex of appropriation into reverse. Rather than the present invading, colonizing and flattening out the past in *Level Five*, Hunt argues that the past haunts the present with the knowledge of events so horrific that they give rise to '"memories" of moral trauma in subsequent generations that are not really memories' [29] Compounded by the repression of the history of the Battle itself (Okinawa is in its own way a 'latecomer' to the received histories of World War II), the compulsion to remember after the fact takes on 'insane', traumatized forms. Hunt lists 'grief, guilt, denial, repetition over-compensation, and . unsuspected ways like embarrassment, or perhaps shame' [30] It is significant that this list encompasses both Laura's reaction repetition by comparison (although it is important to stress that a sense of the uniqueness of the two tragedies is not automatically diminished); and that of the viewer embarrassment or shame at her candour.

If the present of *Level Five* is haunted by the past, this proximity or invasion by its images[31] has not merely a traumatic, but a fatal impact upon Laura. Her final recording is a suicide note, addressed to the viewer. Recalling the retrospective reading of the film proposed by Hunt, the logic of her death (like that of the hero in *La Jetée*) is that she is already dead before the film begins. what we see is her diary and research materials edited together by Chris after her disappearance. Laura has already reached the elusive 'Level Five'

Double or quit

The notion that Laura returns from the dead to address the present, suggests a further line of connection to Resnais's work, and enables the motif of the double to be interpreted in another light. Greene points to the affinity between the alienated, traumatized characters who feature in Resnais's films, and the literary characters created and theorized by Cayrol in his writing and reflections on the 'lazarian' novel. Cayrol's 'lazarian' figures are those who have survived the 'death' of deportation, and who in consequence function as the doubles of an obliterated former self [32] When the actress in

Hiroshima mon amour is imprisoned in her parents' cellar, she is passed off as dead, and in her 'madness' cannot distinguish herself from her dead lover. A comparable link between Cayrol and Marker is explored by Jean-Luc Alpigiano in an essay on the 'lazarian' structure of *La Jetée*.[33] Alpigiano discusses the importance in Cayrol's writings and personal experience of deportation, of the dreams and fantasy life of concentration camp inmates, as a mechanism of survival that allowed them detachment from the horrors of their everyday physical reality. He isolates different orders of dream and memory in Cayrol's work: 'simple' recollections of the deportee's former life: reveries fixed in a stable, unquestioned present; more complex dreams in which objects and colours assume great significance; and fatal projections in which the attempt to imagine a future is typically a sign of impending death. These patterns are found repeated in the different time-travel episodes of *La Jetée*: the first confirmation of 'real' images oozing from the past ('Real children Real birds. Real cats.'); the later acceptance of an unquestioned present which the hero shares with the woman, then the sequences in the natural history museum (and the film's fixation on its celebrated fragment of movement, which, according to Alpigiano, equates to the importance of colour for Cayrol), and finally the hero's desire for another time – the return to his past – which propels him to his death.

Elements of a similar progression can be observed in *Level Five*. Laura's first apparently straightforward recollections of her dead lover – details of their life together, like the routine of the double shift at the computer, are recounted in the past tense – give way to more complex reveries in which she speaks to him as though he is with her, and indeed the viewer becomes unsure who is being addressed. She asks 'Can you hear my footsteps?', after singing the lines from the theme tune to Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944): the film to which she owes her nickname At the end of the film, Laura's final message is a disturbing projection of the futures she might have shared with her dead lover, but which she is ultimately happier not to have lived through, because they might have ended in disillusionment and separation more unbearable than his death.[34]

Laura's status as a survivor, a double who – by reaching 'Level Five' – has acquired the power to intercede between life and death, is arguably the condition that allows her to place herself alongside the survivors and the memory of Okinawa Yet, as Ian Hunt points out, Laura's death remains a troubling and unsatisfactory conclusion to the film A subterranean uncertainty about his own interpretation surfaces periodically in his essay: a symptom of the extent to which *Level Five*'s transgression of boundaries between past and present, life and death, fiction and documentary, cinema and digital media, and memory and forgetting, retains its capacity to unsettle the viewer and his or her attempts at analysis The very promiscuity of memory

33 Jean-Luc Alpigiano Un film "lazaréen" *La Jetée*, Chris Marker (1962), *Cinémathèque* no 12 (Autumn 1997), pp 44–52

34 Alpigiano suggests further affinities between Cayrol's work and *La Jetée* that also extend to *Level Five* the motif of masks or mirrors which summon the presence of the dead double and the appearance of birds as harbingers of death – underscored by the footage of Laura in the company of emus and peacocks her wearing of a virtual owl-mask and her dialogue with the forgetful toy parrot Cocoloco

in *Level Five* – the excess of its images in their intricate visual
inscription, the elaborate mise-en-abîme of its self-reflexive
characters, and its refusal to observe distinctions between public and
private history – leads to an unexpectedly traumatic outcome for the
spectator. We are invited to identify with Laura, yet her absorption
into Okinawa's past, and her final, troubled acceptance of her own,
leads to her disintegration. As Laura destroys the focus of her own
recorded image, and vanishes into a computer memory that denies all
knowledge of her, *Level Five* itself dares to rupture the fragile
protection offered by the mediating lure of its dense textual surface,
and to touch the viewer with the impossible realization that both
remembering and forgetting history exact an intolerably heavy price

New voyages to Italy: postmodern travellers and the Italian road film

LAURA RASCAROLI

*It would be a crime to delay or halt the voyage of Italian cinema
towards the reality that attracts it, a reality that   by now can
only be the reality of the humble Italy* [1]

1 Cesare Zavattini *Neorealismo
ecc* (Milan Bompiani 1979)
p 78

Filmmaking on the road

Road movies are widely considered to be a peculiarly American film
genre, albeit one which has subsequently been borrowed and adapted
by filmmakers of other nationalities, chiefly Australian and European
For the most part the existing literature concentrates on Hollywood
production, and there is work still to be done on the relationship
between American and non-American road movies and on the
phenomenon of cross-fertilization between road movies of different
countries and continents

> The road movie is .   a Hollywood genre that catches peculiarly
> American dreams, tensions, and anxieties, even when imported by
> the motion picture industries of other nations. [2]
>
>   Road movies emerged from America, where notions of the open
> road and travel form part of a potent cultural myth far more
> powerful than in Europe. where all possible routes were mapped
> long before their nation states consolidated. [3]

2 Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark
(eds) *The Road Movie Book*
(London and New York
Routledge, 1997), p 2

3 Jack Sargeant and Stephanie
Watson (eds) *Lost Highways an
Illustrated History of Road
Movies* (London Creation Books
1999) p 18

The road movie is not only considered to be an American genre, but
it is also usually identified with a specific format that emerged
during the late 1960s. is epitomized by Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*

4 Ron Eyerman and Orvar Lofgren
'Romancing the road road
movies and images of mobility',
Theory Culture and Society vol
12 (1995) p 53

(1969). and is derived from what Ron Eyerman and Orvar Lofgren called 'a well-known American daydream hitting the road'.[4] Most critics see the American highway as the emblem of the genre, and maintain that only the USA offers the geographical and symbolic conditions required to realize a road movie proper, even when they recognize the genre's debt to European forms.

> The journey as a metaphor for life itself is not an especially
> American invention, the *homo viator* motif has a long European
> history, but the Americanization of this type of narrative in the
> road movie format is a consequence of the way specific
> conceptions concerning the freedom and the function of the road
> were constructed in the United States [5]

5 Ibid p 55

Accordingly, very few European directors are widely recognized as authors of road movies – and those who are, such as Wim Wenders and Aki Kaurismaki, have borrowed from (but also changed and subverted) the 'American format'. On the other hand, directors such as Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni showed, with films such as *Viaggio in Italia/Voyage to Italy* (1954), *La strada/The Road* (1954), *Smultronstallet/Wild Strawberries* (1957) and *L'avventura/The Adventure* (1959), that it is also possible to be 'on the road' in Europe, and at the same time to make a peculiarly European film, with little connection to the US forms of the genre. From the 1960s onwards, European road movies began to engage more overtly with the Hollywood genre, but still with a strong European imprint – Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) and *Weekend* (1967), for example, or Wim Wenders's *Alice in den Stadten/Alice in the Cities* (1974) and *Im Lauf der Zeit/Kings of the Road* (1976), while other films continued to be rather more resolutely European – Theo Angelopoulos's *To vlemma tou Odyssea/Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) is a particular example. Conversely, North American directors sometimes absorbed the influence of the European road movie, as in the films of Jim Jarmusch, or a film such as *Felicia's Journey* (1999), directed by the Canadian Atom Egoyan.

A widespread impression is that, whereas it is possible to study the American road movie as a compact category obeying a relatively consistent set of rules, European films 'on the road' cannot be contained within a coherent genre and are instead characterized by their extreme richness and diversity. This belief is consonant with broader distinctions frequently argued or assumed between 'industrial' Hollywood cinema and 'artisanal' European filmmaking, and between the critical discourses with which they are associated genre criticism on the one hand, and a particular articulation of auteurism on the other Such an approach, though, is an oversimplification, and a recent book by David Laderman shows how the American road movie too has cut across a wide variety of film

6 David Laderman *Driving Visions Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin, TX Texas University Press 2002) Laderman devotes the last chapter to the European road movie, and recognizes its autonomy from the Hollywood format

styles and contexts while maintaining a constant generic core: the journey as cultural critique, as exploration both of society and of one's self.[6] This broad definition of the genre applies equally well to European road movies; in fact the main similarity between European and American travel films is that the directors on both continents use the motif of the journey as a vehicle for investigating metaphysical questions of the meaning and purpose of life. In this way, travel commonly becomes an opportunity to explore (as is very clear, for instance, in Werner Herzog's *oeuvre*) the notions of discovery and transformation (of landscapes, situation, personality).

Yet, there are significant differences between American and European road movies. The type and characteristics of the actual roads along which the films are set produce perhaps the most important distinction – the open spaces of North America, with their straight, boundless highways and the sense of freedom and opportunity to reinvent one's life, are in clear contrast to the European reality of a mosaic of nations, cultures, languages and roads which are separated by geographical, political and economic boundaries and customs.[7] In European films, the emphasis is placed either on the crossing of national borders or, in the case of national travel, on the landscapes which the voyagers traverse moving, for instance, from deprived to wealthy areas, from the country to the city, or simply through regions presenting different cultures and characteristics. Furthermore, whereas the main vehicles for traversing the North American expanse are the private car (preferably a coupe) and the motorbike (Harley Davidson), European films often opt for public transport, if not hitchhiking or travelling on foot.[8] Another general distinction is that, whereas in US films the travellers tend to be outcasts and rebels seeking freedom or escape, in European films it is rather the 'ordinary citizen' who is on the move, often for practical reasons such as work, immigration, commuting or holidaymaking.

7 On the other hand the European trip is often informed by the yearning for freedom and a new life particularly when the journey consists in an emigration from poor regions or from repressive regimes

8 Obviously, the car is also very important in European road films, particularly during phases of economic growth when it becomes a powerful symbol of social progression

In this essay I use the expression 'road film' to refer to European travel films that are at times very distant from the prevailing American format of the road movie, but whose narrative is centred on a trip, and in which emphasis is placed on the journey and on the road covered, as well as on the process of discovery and understanding connected to the journey itself. I include in this category different types of films made in different eras, from the 1930s to date It is nevertheless necessary in this introduction to point to some distinctions, which otherwise run the risk of becoming obliterated by the subsequent analysis: between the 'urban journey' film, in which the travelling space is the city itself, and the travel film, where the road covered is national or transnational; between multi-location films, in which the emphasis is on crossing different socioeconomic and physical landscapes, and films in which the road (or railway) itself is the transformative element; and, as mentioned

above, between films that refer self-consciously to the American genre, even when subverting it and making it 'very European' (as is the case of the early Wenders and of Kaurismaki), and films which use the road to express a national imaginary and a national space

Travel, space and identity in postmodern Europe

Before turning to the Italian road film which is the focus of my analysis, it is necessary to clarify the main purpose of this essay: to examine the ways in which recent European road films have mirrored and explored the complex question of movement in and through Europe. My intention is to determine to what extent travel films have engaged with the notion of a changing European sociogeographical space which has in turn produced new forms of national and transnational identity. Experiences of displacement, diaspora, exile, migration, nomadism, homelessness, border-crossing and tourism are all relevant to contemporary Europe, as indeed they have been in earlier epochs. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, mobility – understood as changing country, nationality and culture, as well as one's own identity – is a phenomenon that no longer concerns a minority of Europeans but has become the condition of large groups of citizens. Mobility has ceased to be the exception but become the rule itself. This phenomenon is the result of a set of social, economic and political transformations that have taken place in the last twenty to thirty years, a period to which I will apply the term 'postmodernity'. These events include: the fall of Communism, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of the Eastern European bloc, and the decay of totalizing ideologies; the advent of post-Fordism, the growth of disorganized capitalism and of globalization, the strengthening of the European Union, which has encouraged in a contradictory fashion both transnational identification and the shedding of national identities, and, at the same time, the strengthening of feelings of regional and local belonging; the disappearance of customs and borders, the diffusion of a common currency, and the formation of a single market, the intensification of an ethnic component in politics, conflicts such as those in the Balkans, which have made refugees of many and have reconfigured whole geographical areas, the continuing poverty of the third world which has produced ever-increasing immigration into Europe. These factors have reduced barriers and raised the stakes on movement, putting in motion people from outside and inside Europe, impacting on the sociogeographical fixity of a continent of nation-states, and putting in flux the idea of Europe itself.

Movement and lack of permanency have become a lifestyle for many Europeans. Accordingly, Zygmunt Bauman has proposed three figures of mobility as symbols of postmodernity the stroller, the

9 See Zygmunt Bauman 'From pilgrim to tourist – or a short history of identity' in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London Sage 1996), pp 18–36 In this article Bauman also discusses the figure of the player

10 Ibid p 27

tourist and the vagabond.[9] The stroller is the postmodern version of the *flâneur* who characterized early modernity Strolling, 'once an activity practised by marginal people on the margins of "real life", came to be life itself', thanks to the shopping mall, which made the world 'safe for life-as-strolling'.[10] The tourists

> want to immerse themselves in a strange and bizarre element . . on condition, though, that it will not stick to the skin and thus can be shaken off whenever they wish. . [H]aving a home is part of the safety package. The problem is, though, that as life itself turns into an extended tourist escapade . . . it is less and less clear which one of the visiting places is the home.[11]

11 Ibid p 29

The vagabond, however, has no home whatsoever, and is condemned to eternal movement

> Wherever the vagabond goes, he is a stranger; he can never be 'the native', the 'settled one', one with 'roots in the soil' . The early modern vagabond wandered through the settled places, he was a vagabond because in no place could he be settled as the other people had been The settled were many, the vagabonds few Post-modernity reversed the ratio. Now there are few 'settled' places left. The 'forever settled' residents wake up to find the places (places in the land, places in society and places in life), to which they 'belong', no longer existing or no longer accommodating, neat streets turn mean, factories vanish together with jobs, skills no longer find buyers, knowledge turns into ignorance, professional experience becomes liability, secure networks of relations fall apart and foul the place with putrid waste. Now the vagabond is a vagabond not because of the reluctance or difficulty of settling down, but because of the scarcity of settled places. Now the odds are that the people he meets in his travels are other vagabonds – vagabonds today or vagabonds tomorrow [12]

12 Ibid

In the course of my analysis I will refer in particular to two of Bauman's figures, the tourist and the vagabond; I will also introduce and use the figure of the postmodern nomad, and will refer to the idea of transit, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari and from the Italian philosopher Mario Perniola Overall, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the new condition of being constantly on the move involves a transformation and redefinition of personal identity, a question that Bauman has summarized as follows 'If the *modern* "problem of identity" was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* "problem of identity" is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open'.[13]

13 Ibid p 18

My choice of examining these questions through the road film is justified by the fact that, given its history and its characteristics, this cinematic form has the ability to mirror and to interpret phenomena

such as shifting European borders; the formation of new personal, regional, national and transnational identities, the transformation of communities; and, more generally, the character of 'movement', 'travel' and 'displacement' in postmodernity

On the bus with neorealism

In this section I wish to discuss briefly the tradition of the Italian road film. I hope to show that, rather than being the Italian version of the US format of the road movie, some recent Italian films rework the national cinematographic history, and particularly the tradition of postwar neorealism, recovering the exploratory and critical spirit activated by that movement's particular historical circumstances.

As a critic recently recalled, 'a witticism of Zavattini-like flavour says that the decline of Italian cinema began when the screenplay writers stopped taking the bus',[14] thus recognizing that the vitality of much of Italian cinema is linked to the road, a legacy of neorealism's exploratory spirit. It is significant that, among the few prewar films considered to be precursors of Italian cinematic realism, there are two films, Mario Camerini's *Rotaie* (1930) and Raffaello Matarazzo's *Treno popolare* (1933), which, with titles meaning respectively 'railway tracks' and 'working-class train', had railway travel at the centre of their narratives. The film which initiated neorealism, Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione/Obsession* (1943), opens with a truck driving through the plain of the Po River and ends with a desperate car chase. Its protagonist, Gino, is a tramp who is constantly on the move and tragically divided between his conflicting desires on the one hand to keep travelling (and thus maintain his freedom from mainstream Fascist society) and on the other to settle down with Giovanna.

The auteurs who practically refounded Italian cinema after the war, as well as their many epigones, frequently put their characters on the road, and sent them to look for the 'real Italy' of streets and squares and small towns that critics and filmmakers wanted to see on the screen after years of Fascist rhetoric and ceremonial Far from being a mirror of Hollywood road movies, these films reflected the hunger of a section of postwar Italian society for a social reality, as well as a need to rediscover and redefine a national territory which had been partitioned and devastated by Nazis, Fascists and the Anglo–US allies. In his study of the motif of travel in Italian cinema from 1945 to 1965, Mirco Melanco suggests two explanations for the neorealist filmmakers' predilection for the theme of the journey: the nature of the war of Resistance ('it is a war made up of constant movements, of trips and swift changes, both of area and of vehicles');[15] and the new sense of solidarity between Italians

14 Oscar Iarussi 'Errare', in Mario Sesti (ed) *La 'Scuola' italiana storia, strutture e immaginario di un altro cinema (1988–1996)* (Venice Marsilio 1996) p 339 Here and elsewhere in the article translation is mine

15 Mirco Melanco 'Il motivo del viaggio nel cinema italiano (1945–1965)' in Gian Piero Brunetta (ed), *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico* (Turin Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996) p 219

instigated by the resistance to Nazi-Fascism. In the postwar films, in fact, as Melanco noticed, 'The Italian territory is presented in its maximum extension, but distances appear to be reduced, thanks to the sense of solidarity, unity, cohesion, which constitute the force that emerged against the spreading of violence, injustice, barbarism'[16] This is best seen in *Paisà/Paisan* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946), which follows the Allies' northbound march through Italy, from Sicily to the plain of the Po river, a clear movement of liberation of the country, as well as of reappropriation and reconstruction of the national territory.

16 Ibid p 219

As we move away from neorealism, the road and the journey continue to be vital features of Italian cinema, appearing in both minor and major Italian films, including Fellini's *La strada*, which follows the itinerant strongman Zampanò and his assistant, the waif Gelsomina; Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia*, in which a British couple in marital crisis travel by car to Southern Italy in a quest for spontaneity; and Antonioni's *Il grido/The Cry* (1957), following a workman and his daughter's desperate tramping through the Po river valley. Whereas in the neorealism of the immediate postwar period, most classically in *Paisà*, distances were annulled by the new sense of national solidarity, in the films made in the 1950s they become once more immense, 'not only because of the slowness of the means of transport, but also because of the widespread ignorance of places and distances'[17] This is particularly true of films that concentrate on emigrations, either to foreign countries or, internally, to industrialized regions, a type of cinema whose apex is Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* (1960) in which a southern family relocates to Milan only to suffer from poverty, rootlessness and the scorn of the locals

17 Ibid p 224

In the late 1950s, thanks to the economic boom, Italians' mobility increased, and so did the number of films that registered this new freedom Work and leisure were the reasons behind the journeys of the Italians, which more and more often led beyond the national borders 'The enlargement of the space to be explored is progressive, and at the beginning of the 1960s this practically coincides with the European territory'.[18] The economic boom was conducive to a revolution in the lifestyle and widespread values of Italians the private car, for instance, became a powerful status symbol. Characteristic of films made in the 1960s, in Risi's *Il sorpasso/The Easy Life* (1964) two oddly paired 'buddies' go for an increasingly euphoric drive that takes them from Rome to Viareggio and leads to the death of one of them in a car accident The proliferation of private cars was a factor in the government's policy of building roads and highways, a massive effort that responded to the monopolistic needs of Agnelli's FIAT, and that caused a dissolution (and desolation) of the national territory[19] Consequently, a further important theme in Italian road films is linked to the function that

18 Ibid p 240

19 See for instance, Cesare De Seta *Città territorio e mezzogiorno in Italia* (Turin Einaudi 1977)

the Italian highway (*autostrada*) gained during the years of the economic boom, when it

> became a trope for the ways in which economic modernization inscribed itself within the practice of everyday life The *autostrada del sole*, for example, was charged with symbolic significance as the backbone of the highway system, this *autostrada* didn't just connect the north to the south, it sped the driver from the prosperous, bourgeois northern provinces to the impoverished, semifeudal provinces of the south, so that the journey was the traversing not simply of space, but of consciousness as well [20]

20 Angelo Restivo, 'The nation the body and the *autostrada*, in Cohan and Hark (eds) *The Road Movie Book*, p 233

The highway came to embody simultaneously modern Italy's hunger for fast connections and exchanges, as well as its sociopolitical and cultural shortcomings, and accordingly played a heavily symbolic role in post-1950s cinematic narratives Significantly, in the films of an author attentive to the phenomenon of the modernization of the country such as Antonioni, the *autostrada* is shown as a synthetic presence that fractures the landscape and is punctuated by further symbols of ever-spreading modernization, such as petrol stations and big commercial signs, as can be seen in films like *Cronaca di un amore* (1950) and *Il grido*

In subsequent years, travelling became the norm for a richer, urbanized and, at least superficially, free-thinking population, and Italian films continued to mirror the national tendencies Even in the course of the 1980s, a period of deep crisis for the national cinematographic industry (a crisis of ideas, of quality and of audience), the form of the road film continued to be frequently used by filmmakers As one critic suggested, 'the new "on the road" poetics of the Italian cinema of the 1980s and 1990s is also due to the fact that a car and a highway are relatively easy to represent and that camera cars can sometimes help to match different sections of the screenplay'[21] – a comment that hints at the dearth of ideas in much recent Italian cinema, but that also recognizes the liveliness of the genre The end of the 1980s saw the debut of Gabriele Salvatores, an author who in the first part of his career, thanks to films such as *Marrakesh Express* (1989), *Turné* (1990), *Mediterraneo* (1991, winner of the Oscar for best foreign film) and *Puerto Escondido* (1992), fully identified with the road movie genre. Salvatores may be seen as the contemporary Italian filmmaker who most successfully borrowed from the American format of the road movie, adapting the myth of 'hitting the road' to the Italian sensitivity

21 Vito Zagarrio, *Cinema italiano anni novanta* (Venice Marsilio 1998) p 86

Looking at the production of the last ten years, it is somewhat surprising to discover how many Italian films, and how many films about Italy, are strongly marked by the presence of the road. My intention is to examine three films of the 1990s· two concern national travel (Gianni Amelio's *Il ladro di bambini/Stolen Children*

[1992] and Carlo Mazzacurati's *Vesna va veloce* [1996]), while one
is an urban journey ('In Vespa', the first episode of Nanni Moretti's
Caro Diario/Dear Diary [1993]). I will suggest that these films, in
common with other recent works, use the theme of the road as a
means of revisiting the national filmic identity and that they do so by
reconnecting to the tradition of neorealism, both in visual terms (the
exploration of geographical areas that are far from well-established
cinematic productive centres and filmic cliches) and in ethical terms
(the critique of mainstream society by characters who move at its
margins).

Il ladro di bambini: vagabonds and tourists in the homogenized landscape

*Today, towns like Catanzaro or Matera are substantially similar to
Turin and Milan You can travel transversally, north to south, east
to west, and absolutely nothing changes You see the same things,
hear the same words, and come in contact with the same feelings
and the same mythologies* [22]

22 Gianni Amelio, quoted in Gianni
Volpi (ed) *Gianni Amelio* (Turin
Garage-Scriptorium 1995)
p 139

23 Pauline Small Gianni Amelio s
Il ladro di bambini recalling the
image , *Italian Studies* no 53
(1998) pp 151 166

24 See Gary Crowdus and Richard
Porton Beyond neorealism
preserving a cinema of social
conscience An interview with
Gianni Amelio *Cinéaste* vol 21
no 4 (1995), pp 6–13

As Pauline Small suggested in her article on *Il ladro di bambini*,
Amelio's film is 'characterised by an intense awareness of Italy's
cinematic past', and 'is a film that takes Italian film as its theme' [23]
Small traced in the film the intertextual presence of Visconti's *Rocco
e i suoi fratelli*, of Rossellini's *Roma città aperta/Rome Open City*
(1945) and of Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves*
(1948). A further presence is that of Antonioni's films, particularly in
the scenes set in Noto, as Amelio himself has recognized.[24] Small
shows how Amelio retells, in a new sociopolitical context, themes
that were central to the films by Visconti, Rossellini and De Sica,
and particularly to *Rocco* – the emigration to northern cities and the
disappearance of the old native village, the mutation of the relationship
between town and country; the transformation of the father–son
relationship I would suggest that this 'retelling' is not typical only
of Amelio, but recurs in a number of recent Italian road films.

Il ladro di bambini presents, on the surface, a reversed migration –
the protagonist, Antonio, is a *carabiniere* from Calabria who lives in
Milan and travels back to the South, first to Reggio Calabria and
then to Sicily It is impossible not to think of *Rocco*, since Amelio
himself asks us to do so by setting his film's second scene in
Milan's railway station, the same Stazione Centrale in which
Visconti's film began. As Small has suggested, Antonio's trip may
be read as that return home, which in *Rocco* was only imagined by
the two younger brothers, Ciro and Luca. As Ciro had already
guessed in Visconti's film from 1960, the native village, the *paese*,
was already transforming and in the process of disappearing. As if to

confirm this, in *Il ladro di bambini* Antonio mentions that nobody lives in his native village any longer: most people have either emigrated or built new houses by the sea Small has discussed the way in which, while the physical presence of the *paese* may have disappeared, its spiritual force persists in the emigrant's makeup: 'the *paese* has gone but it remains as an illusion, perhaps a necessary one, to those who struggle to find a sense of identity in a constantly shifting and changing world' [25]

25 Small 'Gianni Amelio s *Il ladro di bambini*, p 157

I want to suggest that Amelio's film is only superficially about a reversed migration I do not mean that Amelio's film does not retell *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. The retelling, however, must not be read exclusively in terms of the internal emigrations of the 1950s and their legacy in today's Italy; rather, it refers more generally to the existential condition that characterizes postmodern Italy. I would argue that the society painted by Amelio is precisely – to borrow Small's words – 'a constantly shifting and changing world'. While in the 1950s it still made sense to struggle in order to find a sense of identity, in today's Italy this goal is not achievable and becomes meaningless the only way to survive is to keep one's options open. Amelio's main characters, Antonio, Rosetta and Luciano, are vagabond-like figures, in the sense articulated by Bauman [26] I would suggest that *Il ladro di bambini* be read not simply as a trip through the history of Italian cinema (and of Italian road films in particular) or an updated retelling of the phenomenon of internal migration, but rather as a reading of contemporary Italy as a homogenized land, a desert toured by postmodern vagabonds and tourists.

26 See Bauman From pilgrim to tourist p 29

Luciano and Rosetta are brother and sister who live in a poor peripheral area of Milan with their single mother, who for some time has been organizing the prostitution of the eleven-year-old Rosetta. When their mother is arrested, the two children are sent by the authorities to a religious orphanage in Civitavecchia, near Rome. Two *carabinieri*, one of whom is the main protagonist Antonio, are ordered to escort them by train, but in Bologna station Antonio's partner goes absent without leave, abandoning him to look after the children by himself. When the institute refuses to accept the children, Antonio, covering for his partner, accompanies the brother and sister to their next destination, an institute in Sicily, which is their native region. The trip, though, is longer than expected as Luciano suffers from asthma and cannot travel without a break Antonio slowly transforms from an escort into a friend, becoming simultaneously a father-figure and an idealized boyfriend The trio stop several times to rest, first in Calabria at the roadside restaurant of Antonio's sister; then, after a local woman has recognized and exposed Rosetta, by the sea in Sicily where they enjoy a liberating swim, and in Noto, where Antonio catches a robber and, at the headquarters of the local *carabinieri*, is accused of kidnapping the children and is suspected of abusing Rosetta The last stop is Gela, in a neglected square

surrounded by high-rise apartment buildings where Antonio parks the car to get some sleep before handing the children over to the institute the following morning.

The journey lasts four days and five nights, travelling first by train, then by bus, ferry and car. Their stops are Milan, of which, on this occasion, we see only the train station; Bologna, of which we also see only the station, where Antonio's partner leaves the train; Civitavecchia, with its train station, a bar, the institute for orphans, and the port from which Antonio calls his partner; Rome, of which we are shown a gritty square behind Termini train station, from which the three leave again: a national road in the area of Reggio Calabria, where Antonio's sister and grandmother live, in an unfinished building that functions both as a restaurant and a home; a hotel in Marina di Ragusa, where they spend the night, and a beach where, the next morning, Antonio lets the children swim and enjoy the sun, and where they have a meal in a seafront restaurant; here they meet two French tourists with whom they move to Noto; finally they reach Gela by night.

One critic has rightly observed that: 'The backward journey, from north to south . portrays an Italy that by now is without roots, without a horizon and without the will to fight, without people and without guides'.[27] Amelio chose as the settings of his film a long series of non-places: sites of stopover and departure, places of eternal lingering, places of passage and travel. These are all sites where people do not reside but only pass through, without even noticing the difference between one spot and the next, without the landmarks which indicate a change of setting The characters' trip is long, but the characters travel easily, and when they leave the trains, destinations are always within walking distance, as if to reconfirm that space is now compressed and all places are in easy reach. Music and human voices on the soundtrack are also given a homogenizing function. throughout the trip we hear the same popular Italian songs playing from radios and tapes, and southern dialects are spoken also in Milan, in Bologna and in Rome. Very little landscape is shown during the journey As Amelio explained, the Italy described in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* no longer exists.

> The landscape itself, from north to south, presents similar characteristics . It is not by accident that there are very few point-of-view shots of the landscape, as, from Rossellini onward, is almost 'natural' when filming a journey by train, by car, or motorbike The point-of-view shot as an image of what the traveller sees Mine was not a narrative or a stylistic choice, but because the places, in my opinion, look too much all the same, they no longer are truly different.[28]

In the homogenized landscape, in the constantly shifting desert, Antonio. Rosetta and Luciano truly are three vagabonds None of

27 Alberto Cattini Le storie e lo sguardo Il cinema di Gianni Amelio (Venice Marsilio 2000) p 116

28 Volpi (ed) Gianni Amelio, pp 139–40

them has solid roots: the children were born in Sicily, but moved to Milan where they lived a life devoid of quality in a neglected suburb detached from their origins. Their family did not offer the solidity they needed their father had abandoned them and their mother exploited them. More than the crisis of the family, this spells the *end* of the family, transforming it into a business which commodifies its own members Antonio too is without roots He has emigrated from Calabria to Milan, and this move has changed him so much that, when he goes back home, he can no longer share the perspective of his family. His village no longer exists everybody has left, either to emigrate or to build on the coast. The new settlement, seen against the myth of the abandoned village of Antonio's childhood, inspires in the spectator a true *horror vacui* The half-finished houses on the two sides of a roaring state road signify the impossibility of reconstructing a sense of community or maintaining a link with the past. The spread of illegally constructed buildings along coastal areas, so common in the years during and following the economic boom, is a powerful symbol of the changed realities of the country. of the loss of values and traditions, both moral and aesthetic, which was an effect of the pervasive greed accompanying the Italian *miracolo economico* The unfinished buildings also convey a sense of lack of permanence and durability. Antonio does not belong here anymore, but not even the *carabinieri* can provide security or comradeship.[29] 'It's a secure job', Antonio says to the superior who interrogates him in Noto, but we already know that Antonio's future as a *carabiniere* is deeply compromised by his behaviour over the previous four days In fact his gun and identification card – that along with the uniform make up the symbols of his job – are taken away from him.

29 It should be noted that, in the unemployment-stricken South jobs as a *carabiniere* were coveted until recent times as they were secure and well-paid conveying a respectable social status

Before being reprimanded in Noto, Antonio promised Luciano that. now that they have found each other, they will stick together But even this elective family is not going to last – after being accused of having kidnapped the children and of having abused Rosetta, Antonio knows that there is no future for the three of them. Family, community, jobs. feelings – nothing seems stable or durable in this Italy. Not even love is likely in this world When asked by Luciano if he is going to become engaged to one of the two French women they meet on the beach, Antonio 'sensibly' replies that there is no point in asking her for her address. since 'tomorrow morning they'll be gone' In order to cope with a constantly shifting world the best strategy is. as Bauman suggests, to avoid fixing one's identity, to remain a vagabond.

By taking a leisurely break at the beach, and then by joining the two girls on their trip, Antonio's. Luciano's and Rosetta's status as vagabonds is transformed for a short while into that of tourists Even the soundtrack confirms this mutation, with the Italian version of a famous pop song – 'I look for a bit of blue. I dream of California'

This short experience is. to borrow Bauman's words. 'a pleasant feeling. a tickling and rejuvenating feeling. like letting oneself be buffeted by sea waves'.[30] In their tourist phase. all three characters are made younger – the children look and behave like children for the first time. and Antonio gives the impression of being fresher. lighter and happier.

To be a tourist, though. implies having a house somewhere – something that none of the protagonists has. Houses in fact are totally absent in this film 'We are camping', says Antonio's sister. 'like the Albanians, actually worse' they are exiles and refugees. Even the hotel where Antonio and the children sleep on their way to Sicily has windows and balconies that open onto a noisy state road, conferring on the hotel the feel of a place of passage The north–south route travelled by Antonio should not deceive us into reading his trip as a return home – even to a missing, disappeared home. Antonio's travel is true vagrancy, a vagabondage without horizon and without destination. without purpose and without achievements. in a desert-like land where 'settled' homes, jobs, relationships and places no longer exist

30 Bauman, From pilgrim to tourist, p 29

Vesna va veloce: the female nomad and death on the road

I asked myself where can one die in a country that is not at war? For one who does not have a car, for one who walks on the highway and is there by chance, I thought that it could be a moment of terror If you do not run, they slaughter you like in war[31]

31 Carlo Mazzacurati quoted in Bruno Fornara, Luoghi di confine Intervista a Carlo Mazzacurati Cineforum, no 357 (September 1996), p 10

Eyerman and Lofgren discussed meanings and myths of the American highway as represented and reflected in road movies According to the authors, in the 1930s:

The road and. at the same time, those who lived according to its rules. the throw of the dice, the chance of a new start and the ever present danger of failure and even death on the unknown highway. were invested with all the symbolic power that the frontier and the frontier's men carried for earlier generations.[32]

32 Eyerman and Löfgren, 'Romancing the road p 57

By the 1950s, the idea of the perils attached to the road was well established. 'The road, whatever the route, north–south. east–west. was always open, but was always equally filled with risk as well as hope'.[33] In a similar perspective, Todd Gitlin noted, when discussing the case of James Dean. that the death of the young star in a car crash proved that 'The road, promising everything. could take everything', and that 'In the Fifties. death on the road at high speed before one's time held the poignancy that had earlier been reserved for death in battle'[34]

33 Ibid p 58

34 Todd Gitlin The Sixties Years of Hope Days of Rage (Toronto and New York Bantam Books 1987) p 32

It is useful to keep these comments in mind when looking at the two deaths on the highway that we are shown in Carlo Mazzacurati's *Vesna va veloce* Vesna. a twenty-one-year-old girl from a small Czech village, arrives by bus with other compatriots for a shopping tour in Trieste, but does not return home with them. Penniless, she travels south towards Rimini, hitchhiking on the highway. At a petrol station, where she breakfasts with the lorry driver who gave her a lift, she witnesses the tragic death of a compatriot. The man, in his forties, is drunk and is thrown out of the bar for improper behaviour even though, as he says, he has the money to pay. Totally out of control, the man pours petrol on top of a car and, after being stopped and pushed to the ground by the station attendants, he crosses the highway, provoking an accident in which he is killed This early episode is reflected in the death of Vesna herself who, at the end of the film, dies in a similar fashion as she tries to flee the police who intend to repatriate her These two deaths are, as Mazzacurati's opening quote suggests, comparable to death on the battleground. On the other hand, they have none of the glory attached to James Dean's demise in a car crash – first because the meaning of war and of the road is different in contemporary Europe from the meaning in 1950s America; second, and more importantly, both Vesna and her compatriot die as walkers, not as drivers The lack of a car is an important element of Vesna's identity as a traveller and as a person.

Vesna is not on the road as a (white/male/western/middle-class) young rebel soul looking for freedom – yet neither is she an enforced exile or an economic migrant. I would suggest that Vesna is a new figure of traveller, who is specific to post-Berlin Wall Europe She comes from an impoverished rural background in a Communist country, but the purpose of her trip is shopping. Vesna is not an illegal immigrant, neither is she a neo-slave, 'hired' by the Mafia and sent to Italy as a prostitute The reasons behind Vesna's decision to stay in Italy are never voiced by this taciturn character, but they become clear from her behaviour and the letters she writes to her friend back home. A visual illustration of her motivation is found in an early sequence set in Trieste In the evening, after deliberately missing her bus. Vesna gazes at a shop window display of a mannequin in an expensive swimming costume, behind which can be seen a stylish image of Audrey Hepburn covered in jewellery The camera performs Vesna's desiring gaze, then returns to her face, visually linking the fashionable (and commodified) images of women with Vesna herself. The sequence not only clarifies Vesna's motivation as a desire to possess/embody the image of the stylish, wealthy western woman. but also defines the space in which Vesna's battle will be fought the urban, night-time street – a space characterized as both alluring and dangerous

We know little of Vesna's life in her Czech village, but we can guess that it is the collapse of Communism and the Iron Curtain that

has propelled her to leave. This phenomenon has brought Czechoslovakia, as well as the other Eastern European countries, closer to the western world and to the idea that its consumerist lifestyle might become accessible This accessibility, however, is an illusion Vesna comes to neighbouring, wealthy Italy as a tourist with a day visa, and at the end of the day she is expected to go back home She does not belong to free-market Europe, the EU in which people and goods move freely and border controls are a thing of the past Her first contact is Trieste a port city, open to the sea, a city full of goods and promises, but goods and promises which she cannot afford It is immediately made clear to Vesna that she is not a tourist: she lacks the money and respect by which a tourist is defined. She sits drinking cappuccino at an outside table in a bar *as if she were a tourist*, but the waiter pretends not to hear her and a native Italian, recognizing her situation, offers her the possibility of earning money by prostituting herself, an offer she does not accept

Vesna hitchhikes on the highway, being picked up first by a car and then by a lorry After the accident at the petrol station, she is left after nightfall in a peripheral no-man's land by a driver who expects a kiss from her in 'payment' Vesna refuses again and walks into the city Rimini is presented to us as an Adriatic Las Vegas, a neon strip of shops, restaurants, bars and discos open for business around the clock, shot in slow motion to emphasize the lure of the crowded streets full of strollers and consumers. But the promise of Rimini, of the Adriatic Riviera, like the promise of Trieste, is not accessible to Vesna. She is thrown out of a bar because she has no money Vesna will soon have to accept that in affluent Italy the role of the tourist, the independent 'woman on the road', is not available to her; the role of the 'streetwalker' is. She has become a nomad in the sense recalled by J.D. Peters.

> Like diaspora, nomad is of Greek origin. It comes from *nomas* (*nomados* in the genitive case), a word for feeding or pasturing. *Nomas* used with a feminine article could also mean 'prostitute', suggesting an enduring pejorative link between mobility and femininity (compare the English 'tramp') and pointing to the long masculine gendering of travel.[35]

35 John Durham Peters Exile nomadism and diaspora the stakes of mobility in the western canon' in Hamid Naficy (ed), *Home, Exile Homeland Film Media and the Politics of Place* (New York and London Routledge, 1999) p 26

Without a car, Vesna must walk, or even run When she walks the street, she wears running shoes instead of the more seductive pair of red shoes that she bought with her first earnings. Cars come to serve Vesna not for travel but for plying her trade and making money. The men driving the cars observe and assess her from behind their windows The drivers choose her, purchase her and eventually abuse her, then drive away when they have finished, while she is returned to the street

Vesna and Antonio, the workman who befriends her after having been her client, may meet on the road but they are going at different

36 See Gille Deleuze and Felix
Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus
Capitalism and Schizophrenia*
(London The Athlone Press,
1988)

speeds and in different directions Antonio is a male nomad who has chosen an alternative lifestyle that allows him, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it, to live 'smooth' in the otherwise striated space of the capitalist city.[36] Vesna, a woman on the road without a car, a credit card, or the right passport, is also a nomad, but of a very different type.

Fittingly, it is precisely on the road that Vesna's destiny is decided Back from a drive to the site of a new job, Antonio, who has drunk too much and knows that he cannot stop Vesna from leaving him, speeds the car down a country road and runs into a cow that appears suddenly out of the dark. At the local police station, Vesna is found to have no documents and early next morning is sent to Florence, from where she will be repatriated At a highway petrol station Vesna jumps from the police car in a desperate attempt to escape. She crosses the highway, causing the accident that kills her Her dead body is not shown; instead, Mazzacurati decides to conclude his film with images of Vesna running free on the hills next to the road. This last opportunity that Mazzacurati offers to his character, even if it is only metaphorical, can be read as a sign of the director's love for Vesna and an irrational desire to contradict her fate. More importantly, this sequence confirms and idealizes the image of Vesna as a runner rather than a (street)walker, a character who is not only constantly 'on the road', but also 'on the run', who has escaped one destiny only to run towards another, equally hopeless. With the end of Communism, Vesna became a nomad who is destined to roam even after her death

The journey recounted by Mazzacurati in his film is a 'going west', towards the affluent, democratic, capitalist world, open to the neighbouring ex-Communist countries, but still very distant from them. There is no embassy to which Vesna can turn when her passport is stolen, no community (even an economic one) to which she can appeal. The predictable images of pleasure, material comfort and widespread amusement – so typical of the image of the Riviera presented in many Italian films – are only to be found in Vesna's fantasies Her southbound trip is not towards the spontaneity, truth to origins, spirituality and sensuality typical of filmic journeys to central and southern Italy such as Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* or Bertolucci's *Io ballo da sola/Stealing Beauty* (1996) This Italy is a virtual wasteland of highways, petrol stations and the no-man's land which surrounds them isolated roads walked by prostitutes, fragments of the deserted city in the early hours of the morning, ugly and hot hotel rooms, beaches whose names – Talisman, Florid – stand in ironic contrast to their emptiness. Even the presence of the sea is, in the director's own words, 'a Mediterranean which is no longer warm In its affluence, it has become a little unhappy '[37]

Mazzacurati's choice of 'shadowing' marginal, unsuccessful characters such as Antonio and Vesna, the victims of capitalist

37 Fornara Luoghi di confine
p 10

development rather than its mobile adventurers – characters on the road, discovering the harsh underside of the country and its pitiful socioeconomic logic – places his film in the ideological, narrative and visual tradition of neorealism.

Caro diario: a nomadic transit in the city

> *I don't know, I can't understand I may be nuts, but I love this bridge I need to cross it at least twice a day* [38]

38 Nanni Moretti, in 'In Vespa Caro diario

Moretti's *Caro diario* presents an unusual structure – it is divided into three episodes, 'In Vespa', 'Isole', and 'Medici', corresponding to three chapters of the eponymous diary which the author is shown writing during the film. The film adapts the fragmentary and diverse form of the diary to cinematic language, and therefore presents a mix of autobiography and critical distance, private confession and comment on public affairs. This linguistic and narrative mix makes *Caro diario* (and its sequel *Aprile* [1998]) unique, and yet the imprint of Rossellini and Zavattini is strong A series of elements vividly recall Zavattini's most firmly-held theories, epitomized by his utopian *Cinegiornali Liberi*: the conveyed feel of 'a day in the life of Nanni M.', the shadowing of a real person for a day, the use of the camera as a pen, as a lightweight and (at least apparently) inexpensive medium that allows free movement, and the creation of a cinema that talks of real and individual feelings, ideas, and experiences. In the 1950s Zavattini claimed that the diary, intended as 'the attempt to offer to the judgement [of the spectator] oneself, the others and everything worth telling', is 'the most complete and authentic expression of the cinema' [39] *Caro diario* is consistent both ideologically and aesthetically with Zavattini's cinematic language One critic has pointed to the presence of both the lesson of Rossellini (which emerges in the film's attention to reality as well as in its moral attitude towards life and its contradictions), and of Zavattini:

39 Zavattini Neorealismo ecc pp 71-2

> The physical movement translates the necessity of discovering other dimensions, other destinations, thus of transcending the level of the appearances in order to seize something deeper Those small intervals, in which the camera follows the character from afar, renovating Zavattini's theory of the shadowing to uncover other dimensions of reality, are in this sense significant [40]

40 Michele Marangi Nanni 90 ovvero Caro Aprile' in (ed unknown) Nanni Moretti (Turin Garage-Scriptorium 1999) p 22

It is this idea of movement that makes *Caro diario* a road film that follows and renews the tradition of neorealism The theme of movement is evident in the first 'chapter', an urban journey in which Moretti rides his Vespa around the streets of Rome, unusually deserted because of the summer vacations The camera follows the

41 As one critic has noticed, 'Dear
Diary is a kind of road movie
from a quarter to another from
an isle to another from a doctor
to another Jean A Gili,
'Entretien avec Nanni Moretti
Le plaisir de reconter plus
librement Positif no 399 (May
1994), p 12
42 The term nomadism is used
here as a synonym of vagrancy
and vagabondage and is
borrowed from Deleuze and
Guattari s A Thousand Plateaus
43 Mario Perniola, Transiti (Rome
Castelvecchi 1998)

44 Flavio De Bernardinis Nanni
Moretti (Milan Il Castoro
Cinema 1998) pp 128, 130

filmmaker, who travels aimlessly through the empty streets, squares and bridges of the capital, gazing at the houses, fantasizing on his passion for dancing, discussing films, and talking to casual passers-by (including Jennifer Beals and Alexander Rockwell) The second chapter is based on a trip: Moretti goes to the Eolie Islands looking for a peaceful place to work, but then incessantly moves from one island to the next as he cannot find what he is seeking. The last chapter, which is apparently more static, may be seen as Moretti's journey from one doctor to the next, in search for the right cure for a tormenting itch [41] Whereas the whole film could easily be analyzed in terms of movement, I will limit my enquiry to the first 'chapter' of Caro diario, 'In Vespa', which presents the most fitting material for the discussion of what interests me here: urban nomadism.[42]

The pervasive presence of motion in Caro diario has been noted by more than one critic. Flavio De Bernardinis, for instance, has suggested that the film be read in the light of Mario Perniola's theory of the 'transit'.[43] Observing that our society has lost both the idea of the past and that of the future, and lost both the concept of fatherland and that of utopia, Perniola suggests that we nevertheless live in a state of becoming, of movement lacking precise direction, of a shifting in which nothing reaches its destination. This movement is, for the philosopher, a 'transit', a passage from the present to the present (given the absence of past and future), a movement from the same to the same, which is nevertheless the opposite of fixity and of the inability to transform De Bernardinis suggests that Caro diario is pervaded by the transit because the film 'proceeds through imperceptible shifts, tiny returns, microscopic accelerations', and because it celebrates atopia, which is 'the negation of place as destiny, as absolute destination, as metaphysical objective' [44]

Although agreeing with this reading, I will argue that there is an important distinction to be made between the first and the other two episodes of the film. 'Isole' and 'Medici' both contain a purpose and a destination: in the first case, it is the right island (which does not actually exist), in the second, it is the right diagnosis and the right cure (which do exist). In both cases, there is something to be learned from the journey, as can be seen by the two following entries of Moretti's diary: 'Dear diary, I am happy only at sea, sailing from the island I've left to the one I'm going to' ('Isole'); 'Dear diary, I have learnt that in the morning, before breakfast, it's healthy to drink a glass of water' ('Medici').

'In Vespa' presents a totally different trip, in this case a true 'transit' the election of a permanent inclination to dislocation, to the detour and to fluctuation. Moretti's ride through Rome is not a journey proper, as there is no departure (the filmmaker is first seen when already in motion) and no true destination (even if at the end of the 'chapter' Moretti does stop at the site of Pier Paolo Pasolini's death, this too is a detour in the filmmaker's peregrinations and no

45 My claim finds confirmation in this comment by Codelli The last peregrination to the beach of Ostia towards the lugubrious site of Pasolini's assassination suddenly interrupts but does not conclude the scooter promenade Lorenzo Codelli, Journal intime' *Positif* no 399 (May 1994), p 7

real ending to the episode).[45] Furthermore, there is nothing essential to be learnt from the journey, only a lengthy list to be drawn of pleasant things to do Moretti's attitude in this episode is self-indulgent and almost hedonistic, and his relationship with the city is so positive and pleasurable that it makes us think of modern *flânerie* Nevertheless, the filmmaker's attitude is truly postmodern. I wish to suggest that Moretti's transit through Rome is nomadic in the sense attached to the term by Deleuze and Guattari The fragmented and dispersed contemporary urban space can be seen simultaneously as alienating and frustrating (as seen in the episode of the traffic jam in 'Medici'), and as positive and liberating because its very fragmentation can offer locations in which to develop different lifestyles

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the differences between smooth space and striated space: the first is typically nomadic whereas the second is sedentary The organizing principles of money, work and housing make of the city the striated space *par excellence*, but the authors suggest that there are two forms of urban nomadism that allow 'smooth' living in the urban space the 'sprawling, temporary, shifty shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striation of money, work or housing are no longer even relevant', and the transit 'For example, a stroll taken by Henry Miller in Clichy or Brooklyn is a nomadic transit in smooth space, he makes the city disgorge a patchwork, differentials of speed, delays and

46 Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp 481–2

accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations'.[46] In order to transit as a postmodern nomad in the metropolis, Moretti needs a special means of transport his Vespa. The scooter, which in films such as *Noi due soli* (Marino Girolami, 1952), *Roman Holiday* (William Wyler, 1953), and *Poveri ma belli* (Dino Risi, 1956) had already proved its potential in the Roman space, is the (distant) urban relative of the Harley Davidson immortalized in *Easy Rider* as the ideal means to cross in total freedom the wide open spaces of North America Moretti's Vespa shows a freedom of movement, suppleness and lightness that associates it with the camera itself, a camera that follows the scooter in all its detours through the streets of Rome In fact, the filmmaker on his Vespa appears as a true materialization of the camera The first image of the episode, after that of the hand writing in the diary, is an objective/subjective shot of the camera, which travels forward in a street. A few seconds later, Moretti on his Vespa comes out from behind the camera, almost becoming its embodiment, and begins to travel forward. The

47 Millicent Marcus *Caro Diario* and the cinematic body of Nanni Moretti *Italica* vol 73 no 2 (1996) p 239

'filmmaker's mobilized gaze'[47] – and that of the camera behind him – truly makes the city 'disgorge a patchwork, differentials of speed, delays and accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations' Even more strongly, the city is turned into a film in the eye of the filmmaker/camera Moretti, in fact, transits in his favourite

quarters of Rome, visually patching or editing them, to form a film his voiceover comments. 'What would be great is a film just of houses, panning shots of houses'.

This smooth transit in the otherwise striated city can take place for two reasons. because the city is empty and almost closed because of the summer holidays, and because Moretti has deliberately become a *postmodern nomad. Moretti's elective nomadism is highlighted by his* outfit (he almost never takes off his helmet and dark glasses), and by his ideological position in society: he says to a driver stopped at a traffic light that he will never agree with the majority, only with a minority. Moretti's habitual critical attitude towards the homogenized capitalist society is not diminished by his cheerful, *flâneur's* mood contemporary Italian films and film criticism, American horror movies, high house prices, and the shameful 'monument' in memory of Pasolini all become targets of his satire In the eyes of the urban nomad, Rome becomes supple, soft, almost marginal (avoiding the locations familiarized by cinema) – indeed, with a soundtrack dominated by world music, almost non-Italian.

Through national as well as urban journeys, neorealist road films contributed to the exploration and redefinition of the national space. After the experience of the Resistance, Italy at the end of the war was seen as a territory still very diverse but united by a novel moral tension and solidarity (as in Rossellini's *Paisà*), a few years later, Italy was portrayed as a society divided between city and country, north and south, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders (the landscape of De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* which can be traced at least until Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*). Belonging to a social class and being anchored to a place, with its local traditions, dialect and values, had a powerful but understandable appeal in postwar cinema.

Fifty years later. three films that, among other recent Italian travel films, look back at the lesson of neorealism, show the national space for what it has become – a postmodern desert in which settled places are gone, a homogenized landscape in which the same myths, sounds and words are to be found and heard everywhere, and whose inhabitants are in constant motion, having become nomads, vagabonds and tourists, unable or unwilling to fix their identity. All three films are in harmony with neorealism's preference for characters who are excluded from the dominant socioeconomic logic In common with the neorealists, Amelio, Mazzacurati and Moretti send their characters on the road with little or no means at their disposal (either they do not have money or they do not need it), on foot, public transport or an old Vespa They force them to keep moving. from one place to the next, as if the only status they could attain was that of the vagabond or the nomad, either as an elective choice or as a damning destiny All the characters, thanks to their

position as partial or total outsiders, highlight with their mobile gaze
and their itinerant presence the sociopolitical and cultural
shortcomings of contemporary Italy. But, unlike the characters of
neorealism, there is nothing heroic about their suffering. On the road,
the characters lose themselves, are defeated, die, or realize that they
will never belong with the majority, only with a minority. The
outcome of their experiences depends on their passport, their gender,
their economic status These characters are, in different forms, all
products of the postmodern Italy in which they live and journey.

Television, documentary and the category of the aesthetic

JOHN CORNER

The idea of the aesthetic has had a troubled and contradictory history in cultural studies, in ways that have impacted upon the study of television It has been seen both as a blocking category and a category blocked.[1] The literature has variously positioned it as a source of theoretical displacement and mystification and as an area of neglect and foreclosure To put it more expansively, detailed attention to the 'art properties' of television has been seen to waste investigative time that might more valuably be spent on questions of institution, practice, thematic content and consumption, on the framing of political and cultural economies and processes within which programmes are produced and circulated. At the same time, some have clearly thought that emphasis on precisely such matters has produced accounts too inert to register properly the imaginative densities and energies of the programmes themselves, those little powerhouses of meaning and value arguably holding a degree of creative mystery even in their most banal modes.[2]

This is more than simply the old debate about where to position 'the text' in any given piece of study. Textual analysis can take a number of forms, one of which is a tight mix of cognitive and linguistic concerns in which 'art properties' are either ignored entirely or appear principally as devices of concealment and manipulation.

The category of aesthetics points us towards the organization of creative works, the experiences they produce (or, to signal a key crux, that audiences derive from them) and the modes of analysis and theory that can be used in investigation All three interests

interconnect, clearly. but usage of the term sometimes masks priorities and even exclusions. In this short commentary, I want to explore some arguments concerning the relation of aesthetic issues to television's documentary programming bearing in mind all three points of reference. Quite what counts as 'documentary' nowadays, given the hectic generic mutations that have occurred in television's factual output, has been an issue of recent dispute, raising interesting questions of programme claim and programme value as well of production practice and form [3]

3 Among the range of accounts Jon Dovey *Freakshow First Person Media and Factual Television* (London Pluto 2000) is the most radical and comprehensive

To talk of the aesthetic in relation to television documentary opens the far broader question of how ideas of the aesthetic might bear on the medium itself There has been a tendency to regard television as an aesthetically rather impoverished medium – too extensively dispersed into both industrial routine and everyday life to offer a great deal by way of richness and depth in its own 'works'. The suggestion is that the medium has compensated for this symbolic deficit by exploiting its realist/relay functions and its potential for real or simulated 'liveness'. although exceptions to this easy mutuality with the mundane are acknowledged

Of course, a good deal of nonfictional television is not particularly interested in offering itself as an aesthetic experience anyway. That is, it is not concerned with promoting an appreciative sense of its creative crafting in the audience. Strength of content, including that of onscreen activity, is seen to be enough Clearly, we would not want to make questions of intention a firm criterion here – programmes can be judged to have aesthetic organization and aesthetic effects without their producers acknowledging this. Indeed, it may be something they explicitly deny, and which audiences seem completely unaware of But it is helpful to make a differentiation between work that has an overt aesthetic and that in which it is largely implicit, even if this can sometimes only be done with difficulty.

Here, documentary occupies an interesting position in the television spectrum, some of it being extremely self-conscious and aesthetically ambitious (convergent in this respect with 'high-end drama'), some of it committed to reportorial or observational naturalisms that make it very close to news in discursive character Across its history both in film and television, work within documentary has displayed varied and sometimes rather contradictory attitudes towards what degree of freedom and prominence its aesthetic dimension should enjoy At times deploying a foregrounded aesthetics (as in classic 1930s texts such as *Coalface. Song of Ceylon* and *Listen to Britain*) in which the imaginative appeal of the formal design is part of the 'offer', it has also worked with a marginalized, or even suppressed and denied, aesthetics in an attempt to make its referentiality. its scopic and aural documentation, more direct. The classic reportage of *Housing Problems* (1935) is an early example.

Grierson himself can be seen to veer around a good deal on the balance and priorities to be struck, being alert both to the excitement and appeal of cinematic art but also to the requirement to perform a 'sociological' task.[4]

4 Several of the essays in Forsyth Hardy (ed) *Grierson on Documentary* (London Faber 1979) show the varying emphases, sometimes in the same piece

A gap opens up here between producers, audiences and critics, reflecting in part the three points of reference that I suggest configure the very idea of aesthetics Those involved in documentary production may routinely watch all documentary material, including that in which the topic itself is of personal interest, with a framing concern for artefactual qualities – for how imaginative, well-crafted or 'beautiful' the documentary work itself is. Audiences, in a way that contrasts with their response to drama, are likely to find these concerns a secondary matter at best, possibly ones of which they are only conscious when something is going wrong (such as an editing rhythm that irritates, problems with the use of music, traits of presenter address). Critics and scholars replicate in part the preoccupations of producers, involving a concern for patterns and conventions, albeit within different frames of reference and for their own professional purposes In tracing any specific medium or generic aesthetics, however, the kind of experience routinely had by intended audiences must not be neglected or displaced (painting, cinema, theatre, music and literature variously pose this awkward issue, of the 'viewer', 'reader' or 'listener' as well as 'the critic', to their respective bodies of criticism)

I think we can broadly distinguish between what could be called 'thick text' and 'thin text' documentaries in terms of the density and transformative scale of their mediations It is not surprising that film and television studies has found it easier to develop critical accounts of the former broad category. Works here follow more closely the narrative, scopic and aural protocols of fiction and of 'art film', various stylings of the world are offered for the viewer to experience as kinds of imaginative performance, however much the world is also referenced through them. Moreover, their manifest attractions are often accompanied by the deeper pressures and appeals they apply to the unconscious and to desiring fantasy. They may generate lively critical disagreement, since their values and arguments may often be implicit and sometimes show inconsistency or tension. They may reward repeat viewings in a way that ultimately has little to do with the extractable knowledge they convey The documentary format that comes closest to fiction, drama-documentary (although one might regard it as a fiction format coming close to documentary), generates this aesthetic-critical response in a most obvious manner, as do works whose symbolic emphasis places them, for some critics, in the category of 'poetic documentary'[5] Among other things, this might be to confirm the general idea[6] that 'art values' will be most pronounced in communications that are able to mark off a degree of separateness from the mundane and directly worldly, that are able both to exercise

5 A number of scholars use this category to indicate documentaries that place a primary emphasis on their artefactual qualities and the appreciation of this by the audience See, for instance the discussion in Carl Plantinga *Rhetoric and Representation in Non-Fiction Film* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1997), especially ch 9

6 Recently reviewed in Niklas Luhmann *Art as a Social System* (Stanford CA Stanford University Press 2000)

and to signal their capacities for transformation and for play In his original and suggestive survey of the broader rhetorics of documentary form, Michael Renov cites Hans Richter on the hardening off of this attitude in post-eighteenth-century western art more generally 'The accent shifted, for a "beautiful" image could not normally be obtained except at the expense of its closeness to reality' [7]

7 Michael Renov Towards a poetics of documentary in Michael Renov (ed) *Theorizing Documentary* (London and New York Routledge, 1993) p 25 The reference is to Hans Richter *The Struggle For The Film* trans Ben Brewster (New York St Martin's Press 1986)

We might compare this kind of situation with, say, an edition of a current affairs series, involving reporter exposition throughout, or a piece organized according to current docusoap recipes, with observation of routine, institutional action overlaid by commentary and interspersed with interview sequences. While there is no difficulty in identifying features of formal construction in such programmes – matters of visual and linguistic organization which bear on the way they work – there may be comparatively little by way of imaginative thrill, symbolic impact or thematic dissonance in the representational practice itself to excite critical engagement. What can be said by way of critical comment is much more likely to take the form of the exposure of implicit textual strategies rather than the appreciation of overt textual display and performance. Such texts will not usually reward repeat viewings unless these are done within the frame either of a 'content' value not exhausted by initial viewing or of professional or academic analysis [8]

8 Aesthetics make contact with the ethics and politics of viewing here Depending on the subject repeat viewing of a documentary primarily to gain satisfaction from its depictive styling raises questions about the cultural appropriation of portrayal and the evasion of reference

It may be noted how much of the above discussion bears on questions of documentary values The default assumption is that such values inhere largely in the character of the knowledge that a documentary generates (most bluntly, its 'truth' rating), whether this is primarily propositional or observational in mode The only way that a documentary can acquire value with some independence from its content is, of course, by marking its own aesthetic status and preferably by doing this in a way that is registered in routine viewing not just in the vocabularies of specialist critical appraisal Recognizing, then, the significance of this aesthetic spectrum for documentary work and for documentary studies, I want now to look more closely at the elements from which it is constituted What can be said by way of outlining a typology of documentary aesthetics?

Documentary aesthetics: a typology

I have already noted that to talk of aesthetics requires reference to three key planes – that of artefactual organization (including its nature as a product of practice), that of audience experience and that of theoretical and analytical inquiry. It is the interplay of artefactual design and subjectivity that generates the aesthetic experience and it is important to stop this being collapsed simply into 'form' on one side or 'pleasure' on the other. Pleasurable feeling is certainly a part

of much aesthetic experience but a more inclusive attention to its character as a kind of imaginative event is necessary

The aesthetics of documentary can. I think, be regarded under three broad headings – pictorial, aural and narratological

Pictorial

The pictorialism of documentary is usefully considered in relation to the longstanding debate about the aesthetics of photography. Once again, the creative tension between reference and artefact is apparent. There is, however, a certain degree of opacity, a denial of the 'look through' at the world, which photography designed for the gallery can press beyond but which documentary cannot – at least not without causing problems of self-identity (which it sometimes may want to do, allowing a primary reading as 'video art', for instance). Documentary portrayal is often drawn to a literalism of representation, its compositions, framings, angles, lighting, colourings and movements designed to engage a kind of unselfconscious, realist assent, although its referentiality is always performed through style, however quietly An apparent absence of style (a kind of 'degree zero' television, in Barthes's terms) constitutes at least part of the conventional grounds of trust and credibility This has posed a problem more acute for contemporary television documentary than it was for documentary in the 1930s, when its social claims-making was still set accommodatingly within the broader terms of a young and experimental cinema. But what many television documentarists have rediscovered is the impact and attractiveness of the picture not simply to be looked through, but also to be looked at.[9] The experience of looking at documentary images often combines an aesthetic registration of the qualities of the depiction itself with that of certain, visual properties of the things depicted (their shapes, colours, proportions and spatial relations – as in landscapes, buildings, objects) It may also involve indirect engagement with the subject through the use of metaphor, which usually requires to be read as a discourse about the world rather than a depiction of it.

'Looking at' can be seen as one kind of what Niklas Luhmann terms 'second order observations'.[10] These are 'observations of observations' and their effect is to frame parts of the world in such a way as to transform them into 'imaginary space' without necessarily thereby losing an engagement with 'world'. Luhmann's full account is complex and certainly not neatly transferable to the documentary instance. but I use it here suggestively and will return to it below.

The pictorial qualities of the documentary image, with its organization of screen space into a plane both of reference and of formal design, are in powerful combination with its kinetic properties In many respects these are in line with those of cinematic fiction, where a considerable body of scholarship has explored how kinetics can derive from the movement of things within the shot, the

9 These approximating terms are generally suggestive about the conditions of documentary organization and viewing Vivian Sobchack brings them into her thoughtful essay, Towards a phenomenology of nonfictional film experience', in Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (eds) *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minneapolis, MN University of Minnesota Press 1999) pp 241–54 Sobchack draws on the relatively neglected ideas about film experience of the Belgian psychologist Jean Pierre Meunier concerning the different kinds of consciousness engaged in acts of viewing

10 Luhmann *Art as a Social System,* ch 2

movement of the camera during the shot or, more broadly, the temporal organization of continuity and change introduced by editing. In documentary, the first two of these produce different kinds of scopic satisfaction, respectively referential and pictorial in their grounding. The second – the shifting perception brought about by camera movement (its glides, its drifts, its swoops, its trackings, its movements across documented space, its shiftings of the relationships of distance and proximity) – is one of the most familiar of aesthetic tropes in documentary practice. Its fusing of the reality of world with the motivation of imaginative design is often stimulating in its bringing together of recognition with kinds of 'making strange' or, less radically, what we might just call 're-seeing'. Here, the connections made between our apprehension of the physical realities shown and the subjective (affective, conceptual or propositional) world that also forms the documentary topic are significant. Feeling and ideas condense upon objects, bodies and places, modified by the physical at the same time as the physical itself is perceived within the developing thematics. Such a dialectics, at once sensual and intellectual, referentially committed yet often possessed of a dreamlike potential for the indirectly suggestive and associative, is central to *documentary as an aesthetic project*. It is often a factor in producing what Vivian Sobchack has called 'the charge of the real' as it appears on the screen.[11] Whatever core this has in the naturalistic co-ordinates of documentarism, it can also be extensively theatricalized too (a 'charged real' so to speak). It can work through a pictorial authorship comparable with that which carries the denser, latent and more volatile significances of fiction (an imagined example: an aerial shot shows a car following a deserted coast road as dawn begins to break; it turns off to enter a silent village. The musical soundtrack is bleak and brooding. Is this the start of a thriller? No, it's the opening to a programme on GM agriculture just before the commentary starts).

The third level of kinetics, the much-discussed practices of editing, introduces through its modes of linkage and disjunction the broad range of possibilities for organizing time, theme, space and style in relation to overall documentary design. In doing so, it necessarily enhances and strengthens aesthetic elements at the local level in the management of seeing, knowing and feeling.

I think it is worth noting here how many documentaries attempt to retain referential integrity and yet generate aesthetic value by what we can call an intermittent aesthetics. Such a mode engages a viewing subjectivity of 'looking through' for extensive sequences, projecting a relative transparency in the depiction (and bringing about what Luhmann would see as a kind of 'first-order observation'). Interview, commentary voiceover and archive film, for instance, are likely to establish and sustain this. At other points, however, a shift towards a more opaque representation is made, the aesthetic codings

11 Sobchack, Towards a phenemonology p 253

12 John T Caldwell, *Televisuality* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1995) The discussion of documentary occurs in Chapter 8 In what amounts to a pathology of some current tendencies in America Caldwell identifies a degree of opaque styling an intensified mode of looking at', whose effect is to render the viewing experience 'a numbed alienated trance'

13 Murray Smith offers an illuminating example of one form of the combination in the course of an essay on the aesthetics of narrative Taking a scene from Patrick Keiller's film *London* (1993), a mix of fictional and factual elements, he discusses how portrayal of damage to City of London buildings following the IRA bombings of 1992 works not only as an abstract composition *or* a political reference, but principally in the combination of the two each through the other Murray Smith Aesthetics and the rhetorical power of narrative, in Ib Bondebjerg (ed) *Moving Images Culture and the Mind* (Luton Luton University Press 2000) pp 157–66

becoming thicker and perhaps more obvious, temporarily transferring viewers into a deeper imaginative space (and perhaps also further into themselves) without breaking engagement with theme More attention to some of the precise techniques and patterns involved across different kinds of production would be rewarding. John Caldwell's remarks about the viewing subjectivities appropriate to the newer 'videographic' ways of working upon screen space are relevant here.[12] Moreover, it is quite likely that viewers will shift between primary orientations towards 'looking through' and 'looking at' independently of the 'intermittent aesthetics' of production design, although one would expect the latter to exert some cueing functions on the basic viewing frames deployed It is worth remarking again that it is in the *combination* of these frames, within different recipes and proportions, that the most interesting questions are posed Any pure sense of 'looking through' reproduces the fallacy of transparent access, against which documentary studies has directed most of its critical energy, although a temporary sense of unmediated encounter continues to be a powerful and necessary feature of many documentary sequences. A pure commitment to 'looking at' blocks documentarist engagement, unless it occurs only as one element or moment in a larger referential design.[13]

Aural

The aesthetic (as distinct from the cognitive) possibilities of sound in documentary are in most cases secondary to those of images and in some cases are not significantly mobilized at all. However, that which Barthes called the 'grain of the voice' (made distinctive by factors of, for instance, gender, age, class and geographical origin) can be a factor in the satisfaction we obtain from listening to speech, including that of documentary subjects themselves, and also raises questions of speaking style. Different modes of the formal (such as commentaries working essentially as read prose, the speech following literary design) and informal (well-turned anecdotes, colloquial rhythms and diction) can all deliver a style-generated pleasure in listening not reducible to the cognitive Their impact is, of course, quite often only achieved in combination with specific images and can only be adequately analyzed as such (that phrasing or even word, or pause, across that shot). Here, again, is an aesthetic density that requires more attention, in its local achievement, than documentary analysis has often afforded it to date.

Perhaps the richest and most intriguing aural aesthetic in many documentaries, however, is that provided by music. Its regulation of our sense of place, time and mood as well as its use as punctuation within the documentary narrative system (bridgings, little closures and openings across scenes and episodes) is a regular cue to viewing subjectivity Its effect is often to provide a (light and unobtrusive) aestheticized framing for scenes working strongly within the

'transparent' mode, although it is also used to accompany sequences of 'thicker' pictoralism too Here, it may be intended to figure more fully in the consciousness of the viewer, the resonances of watching deepening with the direct infusion of feelings that music brings. Although scruples about the use of music exist in the broad area of journalistic documentaries (where it is seen to undercut cognitive integrity and fair appraisal) and in some observational formats (where its extra-diegetic character might risk reducing the power of the immediacy-effect) it is another area to which analysis could profitably give more attention [14]

Narratological

Most documentary scholarship has acknowledged how narrative satisfactions are a property of nearly all formats, connecting with a broader aesthetics of time and of duration (with its vectors of becoming, of process and transition) that underlies, in different ways, the forms of television. They are particularly obvious in the fictional models of drama-documentary and the action-development structures of observational modes, including docusoap recipes, but they are also at work to varying degrees in the more reportorial and expositional programmes. Alongside the function of voiced-over or presenter commentary (literally, story*telling*), it is clearly in the practices of editing that narrative design is realized Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow usefully pointed to the 'little stories' out of which an ostensibly expositional documentary on truancy was made.[15] The excursions into story values and pleasures were sometimes awkwardly related to the development of the official argument, suggesting a degree of production tension between the chosen theme for reportage and the imaginative possibilities to emerge from the case-studies selected to illustrate it [16] Story formats in television documentary have undergone change and intensification in recent years as part of the requirement to increase viewing enjoyment within circumstances of stronger competition. Attention to their varieties and to the particular kinds of viewing experience they offer will need to be another feature in the development of documentary scholarship

I have suggested that we need to keep in mind the way in which what is at issue in 'aesthetics' interconnects across artefactual organization, the viewing experience and, at some remove from these, the categories that an analysis needs to understand both The aesthetically generative role of practice requires consistent recognition too, however difficult this might be to document independently In recent writing, Georgina Born has eloquently made the case for taking the 'production aesthetics' of television seriously, as part of a more general claim for a non-reductive sociology of art [17]

In posing the question of how to engage further with television's documentary aesthetics. the notion of 'criticism' remains central, if not sufficient. Criticism, unlike linguistics, sociology. political economy or psychology, typically takes its initial ground in a declared subjective experiencing. How does the programme work? What engages and satisfies, what does not? Fine art, theatre, literature, dance and cinema all show different models of critical practice in which this subjective experience is then made the basis for a more technical, more general and perhaps more socially diagnostic assessment The dangers of over-categoric approaches are clear enough, but television scholarship, including that on documentary, needs to foster the practice of criticism alongside its other analytic tools and its more general theoretical concerns [18] A vigorous documentary criticism would help to keep aesthetic issues contentiously in view when other perspectives and priorities show their tendency to hide, displace or reduce them By taking its bearings from 'inside' the documentary experience, with its distinctive mix of objective and subjective dynamics, criticism's value for understanding lies not in contesting the more externalist approaches to explanation but in keeping up a reflexive commentary on some of the most important things to be explained

18 Here I agree with the arguments about the need for renewal and reorientation in the critical project put forward by Alan Durant, What future for interpretative work in film and media studies? *Screen*, vol 41 no 1 (2000), pp 7–17 Jacobs also makes the case for greater clarity about the distinctive contribution of criticism in 'Issues of judgement and value

Closeup: documentary aesthetics

KAREN LURY

As I am in the process of writing a monograph on television form and aesthetics. I was intrigued and pleased to see that John Corner has also recently been addressing the problems and potential of an 'aesthetic' approach to television. Both here and elsewhere,[1] Corner has approached the area with his customary clarity and has suggested that it is an undeveloped field of inquiry In this short response, I want both to address and develop an aspect of the typology he offers in the piece preceding mine in this issue, and to explore how his interests and conceptual framing might usefully relate to my own work-in-progress

Corner identifies a need for work on television that is both descriptive and critical At the present time, texts circulating around the television medium fall into one of two camps first, there are substantial but largely descriptive books such as Herbert Zettl's *Sight, Sound and Motion Applied Media Aesthetics* or Jeremy Butler's *Television Critical Methods and Applications;*[2] second, there are numerous critical but often inconsistent and textually 'thin' studies (thin in regard to television programmes mentioned rather than ideas) produced within the more esoteric category of television theory This means that there are few sustained analyses that attempt to work with the television text through a framework that is informed equally by detailed description and critical analysis [3] The success and critical impact of John T. Caldwell's book *Televisuality*[4] (established partly by Caldwell's thorough examination of the production discourses of US network television) surely reveals that there is a space for denser critical examination of television's aesthetics

With this in mind. I want briefly to explore how documentary as a

1   John Corner Biography within the documentary frame a note Framework vol 43 no 1 (2002), pp 95–102, and Sounds real music and documentary Popular Music vol 21, no 3 (2002)

2   Herbert Zettl Sight Sound and Motion Applied Media Aesthetics (various editions) (Belmont CA Wadsworth, 1973), Jeremy Butler Television Critical Methods and Applications (second edition) (Mahwah NJ Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001)

3   Recent work that does illustrate the approach I have in mind includes Jeremy Butler, VR in the ER ER's use of e media Screen, vol 42 no 4 (2001) Jason Jacobs, Issues of judgement and value in television studies, International Journal of Cultural Studies vol 4 no 4 (2001), pp 427–47

4   John T Caldwell Televisuality Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television (Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1995)

form can serve as an entry to examining television aesthetics as a whole. I intend to demonstrate that documentaries have signifigance for me because many exhibit certain textual properties that are intrinsic to television more generally. Investigating these properties may then act as a lever in the process of 'unblocking' television aesthetics as an area of critical investigation. Corner presents a typology that covers three broad activities present within the text pictorial, aural and narratological For reasons of space I will concentrate on one the pictorial

As other critics have observed, one of the most frequently used shots in television is the closeup, generally of the human face [5] In drama, game shows, sports programmes, music video and documentary there is a constant return to the human face, often not just in the form of a head-and-shoulders shot but as an even more intimate framing, where the face fills the screen. The recurrence and persistence of the closeup has been explained through reference to the smallness of the screen and hence the television viewer's need to be as close as possible, both to recognize individuals or to see what is 'going on'. However, I think the prevalence of the extreme closeup suggests that there is more to it than this The frequent proximity of the face and the emotions displayed mean that the extreme closeup on television is both sensational but, oddly perhaps, also mundane. Our intimate proximity to the face would seem almost hysterical (alarming and/or funny) in another medium, such as cinema. Yet on television, although the impact may at times be excessively emotional it is not always so, and even in these more extreme instances it rarely seems peculiar or threatening Different degrees of the closeup shot are everywhere on television, in fact television's proximity to the people, objects and events it represents is entirely conventional. It is almost as if television presents a world where things can be known simply by being close by. In one of the earliest studies on outside television broadcasting, an analysis of General McArthur visiting Chicago in 1951, the authors, Kurt and Gladys Lang, report how the televisation of a public event used closeups to create a particular effect This was seen to produce a response from the television audience that was personal and emotional rather than rational or intellectual.

Moreover, in view of the selectivity of the coverage with its emphasis on close-ups, it was possible for each viewer to see himself in a personal relationship to the General As the announcer shouted out 'Look at that chin! Look at those eyes! – each viewer, regardless of what might have been meant by it, could seek a personal interpretation which best expressed, for him, the real feeling underlying the exterior which appeared on the television screen [6]

5 Pierre Sorlin, 'Television and close-up interference or correspondence? in Thomas Elsaesser and Kay Hoffman (eds) Cinema Futures Cain Abel or Cable? (Amsterdam Amsterdam University Press 1998) pp 119–26

6 Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang, The unique perspective of television and its effect a pilot study American Sociological Review vol 18 no 1 (1953), pp 3–12, reprinted in John Corner and Jeremy Hawthorn (eds) Communication Studies an Introductory Reader (fourth edition) (London Edward Arnold, 1993) p 193

In their article. Lang and Lang concentrate on the disparity between the experience of the actual event and the same event represented by television What I am interested in here. is the appearance of the closeup and the accompanying voiceover – 'that chin¹ . . . those eyes¹' As is now entirely conventional in similar public events, the announcer is all too obviously. and apparently redundantly, describing what can be seen on screen. What Lang and Lang's observation makes explicit is how television emphasizes appearance and our proximity to it, as this seems to produce a 'feeling' in and for the viewer

A similar and equally common practice in a vast diversity of different documentaries is the way in which photographs of people, events and objects are filmed The frequent use of the rostrum camera mobilizes the still photographic image so that the point of view moves around the image, 'seeking out' something – though what this is, exactly, may not be entirely clear In many instances the camera zooms in on the eyes and mouth of the person photographed, or lingers significantly on an article of clothing or jewellery. It is common for the same photograph to be used several times in the course of one documentary, and as more is revealed about the events or individual this is often matched by an increasingly minute scrutiny of one increasingly familiar image. Of course, mobilizing a static photograph is perhaps necessitated by the need to present a 'moving image' to keep viewers interested, but I think it also relates to the tactile. sensual approach television has to such material. The use of the rostrum camera allows the image to be 'pored over'. pulled closer to view. and repetition and proximity allow viewers to trace and follow the features of faces, places and objects. And while the audience's understanding may be directed by what is heard in the voiceover. this cannot and does not entirely anchor its meaning The director's intent may be to shift the meaning of one photograph so that it represents at different times, 'a doctor', 'her husband' and 'the killer' Nonetheless, despite the fact that the audience is being set up to read the image differently each time, there will always be a gap between what is seen and felt and what is heard and understood. This is because the image does not really explain the voiceover and the argument being made. and the voiceover cannot explain the image entirely or completely. By both fragmenting and moving in to the image. the audience is pulled in different directions. On the one hand. getting closer indicates that we should indulge in greater scrutiny. look for missed details that we had not noticed before, and asks that we perform an active and penetrating gaze On the other hand. we may find that we are not seeing more, but seeing less, as the image blurs at close quarters, or confronted with a fragment. we see only the unremarkable – a beard. eyes and glasses. Thus. what we 'feel' we know from these isolated elements may not be the same as we are being 'told' by the voiceover. Of course, we may

7 For more on the graphic and photographic in relation to television see John Ellis, *Seeing Things Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London IB Tauris 2000)

8 For a more detailed analysis of the performative activities of documentary see Roger Silverstone 'Rhetoric play performance revisiting a study of the making of a BBC documentary in Jostein Gripsrud (ed), *Television and Common Knowledge* (London and New York Routledge, 1999), pp 71–91

indeed apparently feel that we are 'looking into the eyes of the killer', yet at the same time we also know that this is ridiculous, a performance on our part For equally, we may also be 'seeing' a resemblance between this face and that of an old teacher that we had until now forgotten Fragmentation and extreme closeup may also reduce what was originally photographic (particular, realistic) to a graphic representation, as it has flattened and distorted our initial view of the image [7] As the features of the face take on graphic qualities we may become distracted by details, whether these are flecks of silver in the beard or a reflection in the lenses of the spectacles. Our understanding of the image may be reduced to an awareness of texture, of light and shade, the abstract rather than the concrete The use of the rostrum camera is one way in which the photograph takes part in the 'performance' of the documentary.[8] This shift between the realistic 'representation' of the photograph and the abstract, graphic qualities of texture and light relate closely to what Corner has argued to be the way in which the picture can be 'looked through' and 'looked at' As Corner notes, this aesthetic practice is something that occurs commonly in documentary. I would argue, however, that it is in fact common to other kinds of television programming The use of the closeup in drama, in soap opera such as *Eastenders*, a US drama such as *CSI Investigation*, or in numerous advertisements and news programmes also promotes what Corner has identified as the 'kinetic' properties of the image

We may see this at work again, in the use of the extreme closeup in medical and natural history documentaries In the BBC's recent and extremely successful series, *The Human Body*, there are many instances in which the camera appears to go literally inside the body, into the lungs or the valves of the heart. We are therefore very close, perhaps too close for comfort, crowded into the most intimate and delicate places of the body. Blood or air at times seemingly rushes toward the camera lens, and the effect of being inside and up close is further supported by sound effects of air rushing past or through the warm watery sounds of the blood being pumped around the body In one sense the images and sounds are justified by the voiceover which explains, for example, how many litres of air can be expelled at any one time, or how many heartbeats occur per day More than this, however, is clearly occurring. The images and sounds are literally sensational, unexplainable, even revolting; this seems to be an obvious attempt by the programme-makers to stimulate a physical, sensual response. The audience's understanding of how air passes through the lungs, or blood travels around the body is not, in any intellectual sense, necessarily enhanced by such images and sounds, in fact they may even be distracting But these sequences inspire a fascination, an experience that is tactile, sticky, alarming The effect is indeed kinetic, a simulated rollercoaster ride, the point of view is chaotic and orientation is all but impossible as

the landscape is so unfamiliar What is being learnt here cannot be articulated fully and it is not necessarily useful. and television is full of equally spectacular and apparently redundant experiences

What I have explored here is how a common aesthetic practice within television – the extreme closeup – may encourage certain feelings. and even a way of 'knowing' (or a belief that something is knowable) in the audience While obviously this is a tactic that would seem eminently desirable in documentary. the prevalence of the extreme closeup elsewhere on television, with its associated alternation between 'looking at' and 'looking through' suggests something more generally about television's aesthetic Proximity in television studies often implies the intimate positioning of the television set within the domestic sphere: as an aesthetic practice. however. proximity. or being 'close up' also suggests something about the way we think. feel and learn from the images we see on the television screen.

Value and television aesthetics

IAN GOODE

Television is not readily accommodated as an addendum to the legitimate forms of literature, theatre or fine art, and the association of television with aesthetics always raises the problem of legitimacy The addition of documentary to this pairing does begin to offset the illegitimacy of television, because of the received meaning of the documentary as a form that offers privileged access to the 'real' and the social historical worlds. Within these terms the domestic nature of television and its association with repetition, diversion and triviality can be distanced However, recent developments in non-fiction television demonstrated in the rise of the independently produced formats of factual entertainment, the docusoap and reality television have muddied this ground The increasing penetration of the private sphere has meant that the viewing experience produced by mutations of documentary has served to expose some of the evaluative terms that are routinely ascribed to television by media critics and public intellectuals It is against this background that the annual bad object of summer television viewing in the UK – *Big Brother* – is pertinent to the discussion of television documentary and the category of the aesthetic.

The critical response to *Big Brother* in the UK is notable not least because of the range of public figures who have contributed an opinion on the significance of the programme.[1] A survey of these contributors, whose areas of expertise are usually not visual media, reveals that the broadcast media event offers the opportunity for assessing the condition of the culture, speculating on the appeal to the audience who are obsessed with it, but saying very little on how the programme functions as television or on the experience produced by watching the programme on a regular basis A survey of the

1 Dr Raj Persaud Car crash television, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2000 Will Self 'Be afraid be very afraid *The Independent* 15 September 2000 Germaine Greer, 'Watch with brother', *The Observer* 24 June 2001

2 Jon Cook and Thomas Elsaesser
'Definitions of quality' in Thomas
Elsaesser, Jan Simons and
Lucette Bronk (eds) *Writing for
the Medium Television in
Transition* (Amsterdam
Amsterdam University Press
1994) pp 64–76

3 Charlotte Brunsdon, Aesthetics
and audiences , in Patricia
Mellencamp (ed), *The Logics of
Television* (London British Film
Institute, 1990), pp 59–72

4 URL http //www bigbrotherworld
Liesbet van Zoonen, Desire and
resistance *Big Brother* and the
recognition of everyday life'
Media, Culture and Society
vol 23, no 5 (2001) pp 669–77

5 Stuart Hall Technics of the
medium', in John Corner and
Sylvia Harvey (eds), *Television
Times a Reader* (London Edward
Arnold, 1996), pp 3–10

critical discourse surrounding *Big Brother* reveals that the formal operation of the programme as television that is supplemented by other media can safely be assumed to be transparent, and that the terms of evaluation can be found in the way it reflects a wider culture that is in terminal decline.

It is not only the quality of television, in the sense of the practice and craft of its making, that is at stake here, but also the wider discursive terrain where television acquires value within the culture [2] It has been well documented how television acquires value through other more legitimate forms such as literature, theatre or art,[3] but how do we value a format that is designed to be repeated and exploits the qualities of the medium? The creation of the *Big Brother* format by the Dutch production company Endemol in 1999 spawned a cross-media package that has been successfully sold across the developed world.[4]

Notably absent from the debate provoked by the success of *Big Brother* is an engagement with the nature of the fascination that the format provokes. This programme is about looking: peering and gazing into a simulation of a house through an apparatus of surveillance that occurs primarily, but not exclusively, through terrestrial and nonterrestrial television. *Big Brother* exploits the qualities of television as a medium of relay, and of proximity and intimacy, those intrinsic qualities that Stuart Hall has described as the technics of television.[5]

The numerous cameras and microphones installed on the set reveal a space that is not structured according to the editing pattern of shot/reverse-shot, orienting the viewer into the diegesis of the fiction, but instead forms a mode of vision that monitors and surveys the housemates and the space that contains them. The effect is to construct a gaze that is subservient neither to dialogue nor speaker but maintains a controlling and incarcerating view over the space The construction of this gaze provides the basis for fundamentally different kinds of viewing experience on the nonterrestrial channel E4 and the internet, on which footage is streamed live, and on the daily terrestrial broadcast on Channel 4, which presents edited and narrated footage from the previous day. In the latter version of *Big Brother*, editing is crucial. Editors frequently cut away to onlookers with the effect of isolating the reactions of a person to other people's speech and behaviour. In these cases viewers can read facial expression and body language and build an impression of the person in relation to the rest of the group. Alongside this the print media conduct a similar assessment, and frequently vilification, of character

Big Brother continues the incorporation, via reality television, of CCTV footage into the language of television [6] However, the look of CCTV footage is normally distant, disembodied, poorly lit and mute. *Big Brother* does not rely on an aesthetic of realism and there is no attempt to disguise the artifice of the set Cameras and microphones

6 Jon Dovey *Big Brother* in Glen
Creeber (ed) *The Television
Genre Book* (London British Film
Institute 2000), pp 136–7

are visible within the set. the rooms and garden are well lit, the housemates wear microphones and edited footage is punctuated with cuts to images and sounds of rotating CCTV cameras, fishtanks, and so on This breaks down the distance and danger that a purely surveying CCTV camera trained on public space would create, and generates a televisual apparatus of surveillance where the surveyed is an interior. domestic space and a stage where a game is played out

Viewers are invited to look at the housemates through the surveillance apparatus that controls the space But viewers are also, importantly, looking at a manufactured house from their homes, and the address of *Big Brother* invites the viewer to look into the surveyed space and gain immediate and proximate access to this interior space [7] In Corner's suggested terms, the terrestrial version of *Big Brother* may appear to be transparent television However, the format of *Big Brother* invites the viewer to observe the housemates' behaviour via extensively edited and narrated footage, and make a judgement of them in advance of the nominations for eviction from the house This aesthetic of looking is not necessarily intrinsic to the televisual form of *Big Brother* The experience of viewing cannot be readily separated from the previously accumulated knowledge and the discussions about the programme that take place with other viewers and across the media [8]

There is an element of watching *Big Brother* that connects with the everyday experience of observing and decoding behaviour and body language In a rare, if selective, counter to much of the criticism of *Big Brother*, John Walsh has argued that 'it was these subtle. involuntary displays of self, rather than the who'll snog-whom voyeurism, that turned out to be the heart of the programme'.[9] It is this proximity to, and observation of, behaviour and character – previously the domain of soap opera – that drives the performative formats of reality television The performance of the housemates in *Big Brother* rests upon their self-presentation as members of an evolving and controlled group. in the continuous presence of cameras and microphones The visual fascination that this format generates is largely initiated through television and then registered across different media; it produces a viewing community who can discuss their responses to and judgements on the housemates. and at the end of the viewing week it interacts with the format through telephone voting

The growth and success of *Big Brother* as a format of reality television reveals how television criticism lacks the terms for assessing this kind of television. either as an apparatus of surveillance or as an exhibition of performance. The experience of watching *Big Brother* problematizes a self-contained and medium-specific aesthetic criticism. The 'scopic satisfaction' of *Big Brother* draws upon television as a medium of proximity and immediacy but this cannot be divorced from the evaluative implication that this

7 Rhona Berenstein Acting live TV performance intimacy, and immediacy (1945–1955) in James Friedman (ed) *Reality Squared Televisual Discourse on the Real* (Brusnswick NJ Rutgers University Press 2002) pp 25–49

8 John Walsh The unbearable lightness of '*Big Brother*' *The Independent* 13 September 2000

9 Christine Geraghty *Women and Soap Opera* (Oxford Polity 1990)

10 Clay Calvert *Voyeur Nation Media Privacy and Peering in Modern Culture* (Boulder CO Westview Press 2000)

11 Jane Roscoe, '*Big Brother* Australia performing the "real" twenty-four-seven', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* vol 4 no 4 (December 2001), pp 473–88

12 The most extensive analysis of the relation between film and voyeurism has occurred in the theorization of the apparatus of cinema by Christian Metz and Kaja Silverman, and in psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan Christian Metz *Psychoanalysis and Cinema the Imaginary Signifier* (London Macmillan 1982) Kaja Silverman *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London Routledge, 1996) Jacques Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis – Jacques Lacan* ed Jacques-Alain Miller trans Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth Penguin 1979)

pleasure is intrinsically voyeuristic and sadistic. Voyeurism is routinely invoked as a means of describing the viewing experience that the apparatus of surveillance offers But how is the apparatus of television intrinsically voyeuristic?[10] How is this visually achieved, and how is this complicated by the evident complicity of the housemates in this contrived exhibition of domestic living? The housemates know that they are being watched continuously by the apparatus that surrounds them, but they do not know how they are going to be represented by the editing process and by the printed media

The *Big Brother* format can be broadly described as a scopic mechanism of image and sound that combines the desire to look and to peer (voyeurism), with the desire of the housemates to be watched and to behave in a manner that attracts attention (exhibitionism), through the controlling look of surveillance The unfamiliar credits listed for the terrestrial version of *Big Brother* illustrate how these three key terms are implicated by the technical assembly of material for broadcast The list includes six camera operators, four online editors, five house directors, two vision engineers, three gallery producers, a story producer, a senior producer and two senior directors who combine in a technical process of selection, narrativization and editing [11]

There is clearly an apparatus in place that surveys and frames the space continuously; this contains an exchange between the seer and the seen that is formed out of the interrelation of a number of factors that equate to more than a simply voyeuristic viewing experience. Paradoxically, this is a kind of television aesthetic that is some distance from film and documentary, but which might have something to gain from film theory itself [12]

To argue for an aesthetic reading of *Big Brother* is not to suggest an expanded use of the term in which a significant philosophy of art criticism can be brought to bear on the object Rather, it is to suggest, in a narrower sense of the term, that the nature of the fascination that this object has generated is not transparent and warrants more attention to its form as television. The evaluative discourse that circulates around *Big Brother* is largely a reaction against the fascination for the programme. The evaluative terms of voyeurism, surveillance and exhibitionism describe the viewing experience, but what is not yet fully understood is how they function formally through the apparatus of television and related media

Trading Culture: a conference exploring the 'indigenous' and the 'exportable' in film and television culture

AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, July 2002

JANET THUMIM

Though the conference title, 'Trading Culture', might seem clear and unambiguous, and its evident intention to insist on parity between film and television studies (and their objects) a thoroughly laudable one, the subtitle gives the game away. This conference attracted a fascinating mix of scholars – a mix of nationalities and of disciplines – and insisted on the proximity of the academic to the economic. In many ways this was an old-fashioned wake-up call: academics pursuing their researches into the historical formations of the film and television industries, their texts, their personnel, the cross-overs between them, were asked to alert themselves to some serious governmental negotiations now taking place at the global level.

Under the auspices of the WTO (World Trade Organization), established in 1985, the 1947 GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades) and the 1995 GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) provisions are being explored and developed for their impact on the audiovisual industries whose products can be variously conceived as 'goods' and as 'services' Whether we are talking about 'goods' or 'services' matters a lot, since it seems that different rules, regulations, restrictions and opportunities will apply Hence the

intentional distancing in the conference subtitle from any simple understanding of the concepts of 'indigenous' and 'exportable' the supposedly liberalizing effect of free market agreements on the export of goods and/or services could in fact have seriously damaging consequences for national regulatory mechanisms designed to promote or protect indigenous culture. In her introductory remarks, conference co-organizer Sylvia Harvey, of Sheffield Hallam University, drew attention to two very telling examples of possible consequences of the trade liberalization arguments The first was that the BBC's licence fee funding could be represented as an unacceptable governmental intervention into the market; the second referred to a recent ruling by the European Court of Justice requiring Sweden, contrary to current practice, to accept advertising in children's programmes where these were broadcast from outside Sweden

In what was probably the key plenary session of the conference, 'Culture and Commerce: International Trade and National Culture', Elizabeth McDonald, of the Canadian Film and Television Production Agency, and Carole Tongue, a former MEP now working for Citigate Public Affairs, each made an impassioned speech spelling out the possible consequences for 'indigenous culture' of the GATS provisions. Tongue called for the collaboration of academic and creative personnel in developing an 'instrument for cultural diversity' which might limit the worst excesses of globally organized free trade in audiovisual product. She reminded us that cultural production is not like a fax machine or a DVD player but has intrinsic qualities with democratic and practical consequences In the UK, for example, the government acknowledges the importance of regional investment in news and current affairs programming but does not sufficiently recognize the equally important fields of drama, documentary and feature film production – as do other European countries such as Germany and France. Local, regional and national cultural diversity both promotes and allows creativity and thus, she argued, sustains democracy Her analogous concept of a 'cultural rainforest' produced challenges from the floor and one of the liveliest discussions of the conference. She maintained that just as the rainforest equates with biodiversity, which relates to the survival of species, so *cultural survival* depends on the maintenance of *cultural diversity*, which she proposed will be threatened by the possible excesses of GATS if no explicit safeguards are forthcoming. At this point the 'instrument for cultural diversity', which when first mentioned had seemed an impossibly bureaucratic intervention into the taken-for-granted freedoms of the creative practitioner, was metamorphosed into the saviour of these same freedoms Following Tongue's call for action from the academic community McDonald then outlined the Canadian experience. suggesting that it might be seen as providing a 'laboratory exploration in the balance of cultural expression with

economic reality'. She noted that despite the availability of 200 Canadian television channels, nearly 80% of Canadian households receive all the US channels, concluding that 'our challenge is to preserve our identity when our children watch exclusively US programmes'. In the Canadian context, she argued, geography, technology and market size have made it a struggle to retain 35% of peak viewing time for 'Canadian stories', and 'we have come to the conclusion that a country that loses its voice and ability to communicate with itself may cease to exist' This is the background to the Canadian initiative in leading discussions about this potential instrument for cultural diversity, which is intended to ensure that if, or when, audiovisual trade falls under the aegis of the WTO, local cultural diversity will not be stifled by the exigencies of 'free trade'

The conference was structured in parallel strands running over its two-and-a-half days, and included three plenary sessions with invited keynote speakers. Despite its evident intentions it was dominated by film scholarship – there being ten panels devoted to film as against five dealing with television and three with both. Hence the intention to explore crossovers and to consider textual products in their economic dimension was not always realized. The clarity of 'historical' panels, in which scholarly papers unpacked the effects of trade and policy constraints on form and content, contrasted with the opacity of investigations into current trade, for example the global trade in television programmes and formats. This is not in itself surprising, but it does provoke questions about whether these contextual issues of trade and policy are now, at the start of the twenty-first century, so qualitatively changed that the relevance of historical lessons is dubious. Listening to Tongue, McDonald and others concerned with the contemporary global picture and its many threats to cultural production as we have so far known it, conventional scholarship, however intrinsically fascinating, began to look rather luxurious and indulgent

Nevertheless, in one of the absorbing 'historical' panels, Steve Neale's (Sheffield Hallam University) meticulous examination of the detail of US ownership in 'UK' film and television companies in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated that ideas of 'national identity' and 'cultural imperialism' are, at best, in flux and often entirely spurious. In the same panel Sheldon Hall (also Sheffield Hallam) showed how Samuel Bronston's work as a producer in the 1950s problematized the concept of national identity: his sources of finance, the locations and studios, the national origins of technical and creative personnel, not to mention his subject matter, all contributed to an undermining of the concept, privileging instead the category 'international' Hall suggested that the exigencies of Bronston's inventive financing packages may have led him, pragmatically, in this direction The ensuing discussion focused on these related concepts 'identity' (individual, local, regional, national), 'integrity' and 'cultural policy'

which were at issue in most of the other panels too. One participant, noting that the term 'identity' was frequently equated with 'integrity', posed the question of whether these terms still have any useful function in discourse though such terms are deployed as 'markers' in the construction of legal agendas they have little intellectual validity, and 'identity', particularly, often has little more than a rhetorical function. The discussion concluded with the intriguing question of whether the notion of a 'global identity' (in advance of mass space travel) is an oxymoron. Such detailed exploration of the terms deployed not only in scholarship but also in international policymaking is clearly important, and it is here, perhaps, that scholarly concerns might contribute most to the urgencies of a contemporary politics of culture

The closing plenary, chaired by conference co-organizer Laura Mulvey and headlined 'Cultural Diversity, Cultural Difference and the Trade in Film' did indeed explicitly confront the interface between cultural production and the marketplace Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (University of Luton), exploring the effects of trading dynamics on popular culture as exemplified by the trade in film between the USA and Europe, reminded us that 'cultures are not traded' as such, but rather that 'cultural values may be embodied in goods'. Both Nowell-Smith and the final speaker, Tino Balio (University of Wisconsin-Madison), pointed to the relative sophistication of US capitalism, painting a rather despairing picture of US hegemony in world trade Balio offered a close examination of Hollywood's shortlived but influential flirtation with European art cinema in the 1960s, and Nowell-Smith noted that in the Uruguay GATS negotiations of the 1990s, the US had realized that there was little to be gained from objections to the European call for an *exceptionne culturelle*, since they already enjoyed a substantial share of the European market In these negotiations, he suggested, the USA was already moving on from issues of goods and services to the altogether more lucrative possibilities of rights and concepts – hence the current importance of intellectual property rights, and of the proposed instrument for cultural diversity

The shift from the wide frame of international legalities and policy discussion – as debated in the second plenary session, Culture and Commerce – to the detail of papers such as Neale's on the labyrinths of UK/US ownership of companies producing television costume adventure series and Hall's on Bronston's epic cinema productions was, at times, vertiginous But it was also exhilarating and undoubtedly contributed to the achievement of one of the conference's aims, namely to begin to raise consciousness within the academic community of the economic and political realities within which culture – which includes both scholarship and education, as well as films and television programmes – takes place. Thus, although the balance between film and television was sometimes an

uneasy one, the importance of an industrial/institutional approach was emphasized by the conference structure and will no doubt stimulate new work along these lines, presumably also an aim of the AHRB research centre which organized the conference One such research project presenting work-in-progress entailed the collaboration of two television scholars, Albert Moran (Griffith University) and Michael Keane (Queensland University of Technology) with a lawyer, Justin Malbon (also Griffith University) The three are concerned with the Asian Pacific region's trade in formats, with 'copycat' and 'cloned' programmes and, crucially, with the question of intellectual property – hence the presence of a lawyer in the research group. This seems to be a model that may well be replicated in order to explore the development of the film and television insitutions in their various manifestations and to understand and engage with the dynamics of inter-governmental trade negotiations, researchers will need to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries to a much greater extent than has previously been the case

Intellectual property, cultural diversity, identity and integrity these ubiquitous concepts point to, but do not entirely capture, the concerns arising from the commodification of art, culture and scholarship. These were the central issues informing this conference, encapsulated in the title 'trading cultures' and then questioned in the subtitle's distancing of the crucially ambiguous terms 'indigenous' and 'exportable'. Much is to be gained from the institutional structures which support, finance, distribute and circulate the products of creativity; however, much is also to be lost if we cannot find some way to balance our need to tell 'our own' stories to 'our own' people, with the quite different needs of the profit-driven marketplace in its global manifestation. Here is the call to action, it is the responsibility of scholars and creative practitioners, just as much as of politicians, financiers and lawyers, to achieve such a balance.

Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema Past, Present, Future.* London.
Verso, 2001, 302 pp.

AZADEH SALJOOGHI

Although Iranian cinema has gained a global audience, a full
appreciation of its complexity requires an insider's cultural and
political intimacy with Iran's artistic heritage and turbulent history.
Close Up is an attempt to assemble all that goes into the making of
Iranian cinema A native of Iran, Hamid Dabashi critically explores
the local milieu of Iranian cinema while attending to its global
eminence. In a self-reflexive introduction, his childhood fascination
with cinema is entangled with the quandaries of a culture caught
between tradition and modernity He traces the injurious history of
colonialism in Iran to its cultural, economical and political roots
Close Up notes an amalgam of art forms,[1] chief among them Persian
poetry and prose, a tradition that predates Iranian cinema, inspired its
creators, and attracted its audience. Grounded in oral and written
traditions, these notable performative and literary forms could be
savoured only by speakers of Persian In contrast, the world's
appreciation of Iranian cinema is due to its more accessible visual
construction The uniqueness of this cinema is attributed to an
Iranian audience enamoured by world cinema, subjugated by colonial
force, injured by local government, and deprived of an autonomous
self. The world debut of Iranian cinema thus delocates Iran on the
map of modernity 'as the staple of a cultural currency that defies the
logic of nativism and challenges the problems of globalization'
(p. 10).

In Chapter One, Dabashi explores the historical context of Iranian
cinema and evokes certain national events and names. Artists and
revolutionary intellectuals are identified as the initiators of cultural
change. His argument is that the role of minorities in the conception

1   *Naqqah* (public storytelling)
Pardeh-dari Shamayel-gardani
(illustrated public storytelling)
Taziyeh (passion play) and *Ro-
hozi* (popular theatre)

of cinema and the religious resistance to this major medium of modernity situates Iranian cinema in a combative pose. Thus 'Iranian subjectivity' emerges from the collision between the 'Qur'anic man' and the ideas of 'Enlightenment' embodied by the moving image (p 13) He untangles the intricate web of imperialist control and imperial corruption from modernity's liberating aspects. 'Art begins to define a location for itself beyond the colonially conditioned modernity and clerically militated anti-modernity' (p 18). Thus, a cinematically mediated 'Iranian self' rises from a famished national subjectivity.

By now, *Close Up*'s reader senses colonialism's multifaceted guise in Iran. Dabashi revisits and emphasizes the aforementioned themes in Chapter Two, as indicated in the title. 'The Making of An Iranian Filmmaker: Abbas Kiarostami'. Here he assembles a spiral of philosophical terms – 'being-in-time; pre-interpretative; being-there; pre-theoretical; being-toward-death; being-toward-now' – to illustrate the de-creation of reality in the 'pre-metaphysical' moment where Kiarostami's spectators experience life-before-culture (pp 52–3, 59) Dabashi therefore constructs Kiarostami as being beyond his geographical historicity and presents him as a 'pre-cultural' mediator with 'cosmovision', that is an understanding which is not limited to or defined by any culture (p. 63). He argues that the 'matter-of-factness' of Kiarostami's camerawork is due to his 'redrafting of reality', involving the collapse of binary oppositions, and a defamiliarization of the familiar (pp. 48, 52, 59). Interestingly, despite Dabashi's overall admiration for Kiarostami, he despises Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us Away* (1999),[2] which he assesses in Chapter Seven.

Dabashi devotes the following three chapters to challenging interviews with the established directors, Bahram Beiza'i, Bahman Farmanara, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf Here Dabashi's inquisitions provide him with the evidence to affirm the universal agency of cinema in simultaneously resisting yet encroaching on both modernity and tradition. Beiza'i's involvement with performing arts and knowledge of Persian mythology is seen to animate his cinematic aesthetics with an 'uncanny ability to generate that authorial moment when a culture is in communion with its mythical subconscious' (p 91) In contrast to this, Dabashi argues that while Kiarostami can be seen to have abandoned metaphysics to reach naked reality, Beiza'i rejuvenates mythology to challenge invisible cultural fears In his analysis Dabashi cites Iranian and non-Iranian myths and scholars to unravel Beiza'i's timely cinematic use of mythology. While intriguing, this mythological focus can lead to a rather narrow interpretation of at least one of Beiza'i's films For example, although *Bashu the Little Stranger* (1986) is set in the midst of the Iran–Iraq war,[3] Dabashi's analysis relies entirely on the relationship between myth and women and ignores the specificity of

2 I am thinking specifically of Dabashi's reading of the dungeon scene as a 'rape scene where the protagonist meets a village girl This, I think misses Kiarostami s reflection on social mistreatment Farrokhzad endured as a woman of opinion

3 Dabashi does not explore the link between the film s opening sequence where Bashu escapes the southern war zone and unknowingly ends up far away in northern Iran, to the rest of the film

war to this equation In his discussion of and with Farmanara.
Dabashi reveals the 'inside story' of Iranian and western cinema.
Farmanara shares the censorship hurdles he overcame in making
Prince Ehtejab (1974),[4] the halt in directing films prior to *Smell of
Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine (*2000), and his disgust with the
international film festival directors' demands on filmmakers. In this
latter film Dabashi admires and pays particular attention to the
portrayal of the intellectual in its representation of a complex
character with cosmopolitan vision and insight into Iranian social
intricacies [5] Following on from his discussion with Farmanara.
Dabashi also credits the renaissance in Iranian cinema to the Farabi
Foundation, the ban of foreign films, the elimination of sex and
violence, and censorship In the last chapter of this section, Dabashi
interviews Makhmalbaf, a self-taught filmmaker, in a more intimate
manner than his previous interviews. Makhmalbaf's work exposes
Pahlavi prisons, revolution's chaos and its oppressive aftermath
Ironically, perhaps, torture and oppression make him commited to
kindness and life. Dabashi describes how Makhmalbaf's cinema
reveals his change of perspective from a diehard Muslim
revolutionary to an emotional relativist – *A Moment of Innocence*
(1995)[6] is seen as a brilliant revision of an era's dogma

In his next chapter Dabashi draws upon Gilles Deleuze and Felix
Guattari to explore Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's cinema. He suggests
that her rendition of schizoid familial relationships is able to confront
cultural repression and reconstruct feminine sexuality beyond its
patriarchal or colonial definition. In particular, he argues that Bani-
Etemad's documentary and feature films, in representing the working
class and the destitute, expose 'the material misery of the dominated'
and evince the bondage of 'capitalism and Oedipalization' (p. 227)
He goes on.

> No other filmmaker has dared imagine the Iranian subject so
> radically otherwise, so constitutionally emancipated, from the
> external tyrannies of the traditional and internal imperialism of the
> Oedipal . . Against generations of 'territorialization'   Bani-
> Etemad's films   are a defiant act of deterritorialization (p. 228).

Dabashi's theoretical treatment of Bani-Etemad's realism suggests
that she surpasses Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf's 'tease' with reality.
Although this chapter begins with an account of Iranian feminists[7]
and makes their history crucial to Bani-Etemad's 'critical memory,'
Dabashi's use of mainly western theories and the exclusion of recent
studies on Iranian cinema diminishes a fuller understanding of her
filmmaking in its own terms.

After an enthusiastic yet polemical description of these selected
filmmakers' lives and labour, Dabashi disputes the local and global
durability of their latest films, some of which were presented at the
Eighteenth Fajr International Film Festival (2000). He argues that it

appears as if Iranian intellectuals – the filmmaker, novelist, poet, artist or journalist – have almost inadvertently substituted 'their creative egos for the collective consciousness of society at large' (p 246) This is problematic, Dabashi argues, since the rapid globalization of all national interests and the transnativist ideology of the next generation make this stance seem 'self-absorbed' and outmoded Although he agrees that in the past the public intellectual's surrogate ego strongly influenced the development of an 'Iranian subjectivity', he stresses that there is now a need for an 'other-centred' intellectual who will spare us the previous generation's narcissistic megalomania. He contrasts this with the new generation of filmmakers, the offspring of revolution and war, who display such intellect and artistry. They, Dabashi argues, transcend the 'nativist disposition' of the older generation This younger generation's characteristics are seen as being 'beyond metaphysics and ideology   challenging the official claim of national authenticity . poetic pulverization of the creative ego' (pp. 260–61). Within this grouping Dabashi identifies and applauds the works of Hasan Yektapanah, Bahman Qobadi and Samira Makhmalbaf Interestingly, all these directors have received recognition at the Cannes Film Festival Specifically, Dabashi cherishes Makhmalbaf's *Blackboard* (2000) writing that: 'This is Iranian cinema at its absolute best, where the Iranian particular is universalized without the slightest concession to that particularity or its universality' (p. 273). What distinguishes this generation, Dabashi suggests, is that they have emerged from a historical context marked by a lack of post-revolutionary public intellectual heroes and the ideological and political failure of the revolution

Although the book's title implies that it will serve as a closeup of Iranian cinema, Dabashi's fondness for certain filmmakers excludes recent figures such as Tahmineh Milani, Jafar Panahi, Abolfazl Jalili and Majid Majidi, to name but a few. Thus while *Close Up* is in many ways a unique bridge, where the works of national and international scholars merge to render the essence of a culturally specific but globally admired cinema, a major drawback to its usefulness as a reference book is the lack of a subject index In addition, Dabashi apparently overlooks existing work by other relevant scholars, chief among them Farzaneh Milani, Nasrin Rahimieh, Negar Mottahedeh and Hamid Naficy. Also, instead of a theoretical discourse that is embedded in the cultural, economical and political climate that created Iranian cinema, Dabshi's discourse is, at certain points, trapped within the western critical tradition Otherwise, he does manage to be 'glocal' – 'the only way you can be global is to be local. And the only way to be local is to have a global vision' (p. 151) Ultimately, where the book does succeed is in providing an interrogative framework for future studies on Iranian cinema.

Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 338 pp.

KRISTIAN MOEN

While the images of Norman McLaren's paint on celluloid, the voices of Pierre Perrault's storytellers or the sounds of David Cronenberg's squishy bodies might come to mind when we think of Canada's films, a conversation regarding the complexities and contradictions of national identity has long been central to the study of Canadian cinema. In this contribution to the conversation, Christopher E Gittings explores the ways in which cinema has reflected and challenged the myths, exclusions and diversities within a Canadian national imaginary. In order to examine this subject, Gittings sets himself two specific tasks First, 'addressing the cinema we might not know we have, or might have forgotten we have' (p. 3), Gittings aims to 'catch Canadian cinema in the act of construction, to apprehend its sometimes-embarrassing aesthetic and ideological acts of self-production' (p 4) This discussion draws largely on idiosyncratic yet revealing films from the first sixty years of Canadian cinema Second, Gittings aims to examine the 'interruption by Others to the nation' and focus on 'those who had formerly been held at the limits of national cinema – First Nations, peoples of colour, women and gays and lesbians . ' (p. 4). Here, Gittings focuses mainly on films of the last twenty years which self-consciously and self-reflexively interrogate issues of representation. Although these are grand aims beyond the scope of any single book, one certainly gets the sense of the necessary and rewarding discussion which opens up with the shift away from the stock tensions (between Canadian and American culture, Québécois and Anglo-Canadian nationhood, documentary and fiction filmmaking, and civilization and nature) which have often been seen as shaping Canadian national cinema

REVIEW

The decision to cover all of Canada's film history makes this task especially difficult. Rather than discuss more than a century of film production through categories of periods, regions, filmmakers, institutions or forms, the work is made up predominantly of close readings of over fifty films. Incorporating a broad range of film practices and moving through an array of different social and historical contexts leads to a potentially skewed perspective of cinema history in Canada; for example, there is more space devoted to the obscure *Secrets of Chinatown* (1935) than there is to animated film But films have not been chosen as representative of Canadian *cinema*, but rather 'on the basis of their diachronic representativeness of national(ist) poses and their deconstruction of those poses' (p. 5) The selection of films derives from what Gittings sees as the most pertinent concerns of the national imaginary The variety of elements raised by this expansive scope does not lead to a specific conclusion – there is no 'conclusion' in the book – but it makes for a wide-ranging and sometimes dizzying study

In what I find to be the book's most dynamic and comprehensive chapter, 'Visualizing First Nations', Gittings begins with detailed discussions of five films which are directed by non-First Nation filmmakers who are 'sympathetic to the plight of First Nations, some of [whom] inadvertently re-inscribe, while others critically examine, the problematic of . . ethnographic cinema' (p 198). Their films are set beside 'the process of decolonization as practised by Native film-makers' (p. 199). A series of striking contrasts and repetitions within Canadian cinematic representations of First Nations becomes visible: the spectre of violent confrontation, the use and reappropriation of stereotypes, the personal and social connections to nation(s) The focus on particular issues of representation and the relatively limited historical context of these films provides a suitable space for examining the types of concerns at the heart of this book.

In the middle chapters – a short one focusing on the nation-building mandate of the National Film Board and a much longer one on the uses of film genres in Anglo-Canadian and Québécois allegories of nationhood – the book is less effective The reliance on individual case studies and the sudden leaps from context to context sometimes come across as not allowing for a sufficient engagement with a complex and shifting history that has already been extensively examined For example, in his discussion of the National Film Board (NFB), Gittings examines a clear instance of nation-building through film in *Peoples of Canada* (1947), but does not go into much detail regarding the changing approaches to representations of Canada that run throughout the history of the NFB Gittings writes that 'The political and economic structures shaping a Canadian national cinema have shifted from the early entrepreneurial cinema . . and the racially exclusive and utilitarian impulses of commerce and trade that drove documentary film production under the CGMPB [Canadian

Government Motion Picture Bureau] and the first two decades of the
NFB to a politically engaged documentary and feature-film
production' (p 102). Considering the book's concerns, this crucial
period – which covers the last forty years of Canadian cinema – is
not given the attention it deserves Moreover, the issues which are
central to the book are very much current concerns of the NFB,[1] and
one might expect a more detailed explication of the ways in which
identity, representation and nation are currently approached in this
key institution of Canadian film culture. There is, however, little of
Canadian film culture which Gittings omits completely – there are
succinct discussions of a range of related subjects, from Studio D to
Telefilm Canada However, the brevity with which they are discussed
suggests that they are present more for the sake of
comprehensiveness than analysis

1   Study of its website
    www nfb ca will confirm this

The two chapters on films made, for the most part, before the
founding of the NFB are direct and focused, examining elements of
the Canadian national imaginary present in early Canadian cinema
There are some interesting discussions of issues raised by little-
known Canadian films, such as the confluence of melodrama and
nation-building in *An Unselfish Love* (1910), the savage ethnography
of *Saving the Sagas* (1928), and the racism of *Secrets of Chinatown*
The most striking film discussed in these two chapters is *Of
Japanese Descent an Interim Report* (1945), a ludicrous and
frightening piece of government propaganda which attempts to justify
the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. These
films clearly reflect central elements of Canadian history and society
When Gittings discusses two more well-known and complex films,
Back to God's Country (1919) and *Drylanders* (1963), he tends to
use them as illustrations of particular national ideologies, rather than
investigate their difficulties and contradictions.

The final two chapters raise a host of issues. In under thirty pages,
in 'Multicultural Fields of Vision', Gittings manages not only to
address films made by Chinese-Canadians (*Moving the Mountain*
[1993] and *Double Happiness* [1994]), Japanese-Canadians (*By This
Parting* [1998]), Indo-Canadians (*Masala* [1992]) and African-
Canadians (*Rude* [1994]), but also to raise issues of documentary,
pastiche, genre, urban experience, multiculturalism and a great deal
more He discusses the ways in which these films redress the
imagination of nation in the films of the National Film Board and
before – rather than set up a stable foundation for being Canadian,
these films contest representation and test boundaries Both this
chapter and the final chapter, 'Screening Gender and Sexuality',
engage with the knotty issues of representation both within the films
and through the selection of the films to discuss While choosing
only three films with which to represent queer cinema, for example,
cannot do justice to its history and implications, Gittings does
effectively bring out many important concerns regarding

representation He is careful not to claim that his analysis is comprehensive, and he is aware of the dangers of ghettoizing that might follow from his selection of supposedly representative films.

Gittings is at his best in discussions of relations between film and Canadian history, and he lucidly provides a range of clear historical background when it is relevant. This material basis is coupled with an appropriate and wide-ranging use of theory One element which stands out in the book is its consistent patience with describing historical events and theoretical concepts. His efforts at social contextualization – particularly his discussions of Québécois nationalism and the weaknesses of Canadian multiculturalism – are less successful, since he does not devote the kind of space needed to engage truly with the full implications of these issues. While Gittings is careful to explain that his project does not claim to be encyclopaedic, it would have benefited from the inclusion of a more extensive and wide-ranging sample of films, exploring what Thomas Waugh refers to as the 'prolific materiality of film cultures in Canada .. sixty years of the NFB documentary and animation, forty years of experimental films, thirty years of federally funded independent features, and thirty years of artists' videos'[2] *Canadian National Cinema* does not fully engage with the depth of this cinematic history, nor its institutional, financial and cultural contexts, and this is perhaps its greatest drawback.

This is a book rich in ideas and discussions of specific film texts, which endeavours to expand our understanding of the ways in which Canada – in its diversity and its attempts to efface this diversity – has represented itself within film. The book does not function as an introduction to Canadian cinema, nor should it Gittings presents Canadian film history in a creative, non-linear fashion which reflects the range of limits and possibilities that have been brought to the cinematic imagining of Canada.

2 Thomas Waugh Cinemas, nations masculinities the Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture (1998)', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* vol 8, no 1 (1999), p 35

Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: an Ethnography of Television, Womanhood and Nation in Postcolonial India.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, 429 pp.

Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 393 pp.

SHANTI KUMAR

The two books reviewed here provide alternative, and somewhat contrasting, approaches to the study of television in postcolonial India. Purnima Mankekar uses an ethnographic approach to study television and its audiences by examining representations of gender and nationalism in television serials and dramas on Doordarshan – the state-sponsored network – in relation to the discourse of womanhood in postcolonial India Arvind Rajagopal, on the other hand, focuses on the political and economic dimensions of television in the national public culture by analyzing the role of Doordarshan as a state-sponsored network in relation to the rise of Hindu nationalism in postcolonial India Together, they constitute essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the growing influence of television in India

Mankekar's book is centrally concerned with how the state-sponsored network in India hails television audiences into hegemonic discourses of nation, gender and class through mainstream ideals of patriotism, duty, family and honour. The book is divided into three parts; each part comprising two thematically related chapters In Part I, 'Fields of Power' the National Television Family', Mankekar describes how Doordarshan transformed from a state-sponsored network devoted to spreading messages of national integration into a commercial medium invested in the production of entertainment programmes such as serials, dramas and sitcoms She plots the

institutional and ideological transformations of a national network in relation to the emergence of a 'national family' of upwardly mobile, middle-class consumers who religiously tune in to its commercial fare. Mankekar describes how commercial programming on Doordarshan tried to identify with this powerful class of consumers by promoting and participating in the construction of a hegemonic image of the Indian Woman – *Nai Bharatiya Nari* – at the centre of the national family In television serials such as *Udaan* and *Rajani*, the New Indian Woman is represented as a modern, educated, middle-class consumer – and almost always a Hindu. As the idealized representative of the new Indian woman, she is capable of working both inside and outside the home, and is ultimately devoted to her family and her nation In Part II, 'Engendering Communities', Mankekar highlights the hegemonic power of Doordarshan's idealized images of the nation, the family and the Indian woman by analyzing critically the gendered discourses of production and reception in the television serialization of two Hindu epics, *Ramayan* (1987–89) and *Mahabharat* (1988–90). In her analysis of *Mahabharat*, Mankekar focuses on the most powerful segment of the epic – the public disrobing of Draupadi, the lead female character Combining textual analysis of the episode with ethnographic observations, Mankekar demonstrates how discourses of nationalism and gender overlap in the divergent readings of the epic among the serial's (male) producers and its women viewers Mankekar finds that the producers and the viewers saw Draupadi's character as an index of the position of women in Indian (Hindu) society, and in more symbolic terms as the female icon of the Indian nation However, Mankekar's ethnography of female viewers also reveals that in addition to the hegemonic nationalist readings, many women viewed Draupadi's disrobing as a marker of women's vulnerability, and her rage as the rage of a woman wronged by a patriarchal society

In Part III, 'Technologies of Violence', Mankekar further interrogates the intertwined discourses of nationalism and gender in two serials on Doordarshan: *Param Veer Chakra* (1990) and *Tamas* (1988) While *Param Veer Chakra* (*PVC*) was a fictionalized account of military heroes who have won India's highest medal of honour, *Tamas* was a dramatic serialization of the tragic tale of Partition in 1947 and violence between Hindus and Muslims in India and Pakistan A common theme in these two serials on Doordarshan, Mankekar argues, is the state-sponsored anxiety to recast the violence of nationhood in terms of masculine ideals of patriotic duty and familial honour which are constantly mediated by hegemonic notions of the New Indian Woman and her idealized role in the nation and the family. As Mankekar rightly concludes, the state-sponsored discourses of nationalism on Doordarshan which idealize women only as selfless mothers and loyal wives, work effectively to marginalize other female roles that are considered

threatening to the national family, and therefore unworthy of the New Indian Woman.

In the Epilogue, 'Sky Wars', Mankekar tries to bring the book up to date with a discussion of transnational satellite and cable television channels such as STAR TV which arrived in India in 1991, soon after the fieldwork for this study was completed. These are issues, as Mankekar concedes, worthy of further research, and her attempt to deal with them in the book is noteworthy. However, the Epilogue could have been better used to frame the book in relation to some of these very important transformations of globalization in Indian television in recent years. The dynamic relation between national and transnational networks that Mankekar highlights in the Epilogue, brings into question the book's central premiss that Doordarshan holds a monopoly over the production and reception of gendered representations in national programming in India. In other words, how does the emergence of satellite television programming through transnational networks such as STAR TV and MTV contest or contribute to Doordarshan's hegemony over representations of nationalism and gender in postcolonial India? Moreover, even in the pre-satellite television era, Doordarshan's national programming had to contend with the popularity of Indian cinema and the vernacular diversity of print media for the attention of its vast audiences. In this heterogeneous terrain of national media in India, it is necessary to examine whether the popularity of Indian cinema and vernacular print media enabled or disrupted the hegemony of Doordarshan's idealized representation of the New Indian Woman in serials such as *Udaan* and *Rajani* or in epics such as *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*

Coincidentally, Arvind Rajagopal, whose book was published a year later, in 2000, also conducted most of his fieldwork on Doordarshan's telecast of *Ramayan* before the advent of satellite television in India. Therefore, not unlike Mankekar, Rajagopal is unable adequately to attend to the sweeping transformations of global media networks in the 1990s, even as he acknowledges their centrality to the study of Indian media However, what makes Rajagopal's book unique – and therefore clearly distinct from Mankekar's study of Indian television during the same period – is his focus on the question of Doordarshan's influence as a national medium in relation to the prevalence of vernacular print media alternatives in India's heterogeneous public culture. By focusing on Doordarshan's telecast of the Hindu epic *Ramayan* at a time when Hindu nationalism was on the rise, particularly among Hindi-speaking communities in north India, Rajagopal explores the relationship between state-sponsored television, vernacular print media and the national public culture in India The book is divided into six chapters In Chapter One, 'Hindu Nationalism and Cultural Forms of Indian Politics', Rajagopal outlines the political agendas

and the electoral necessities that influenced the self-professed 'secular' government, led by the Congress Party, enthusiastically to sponsor the telecast of a Hindu religious epic on the state-sponsored network When the ruling Congress Party officially sanctioned the broadcast of the television epic to cultivate the affinities of a broad base of Hindu audiences across the country, it did not anticipate that a marginal opposition party, the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) would benefit instead As Rajagopal points out, the BJP effectively used the popularity of the *Ramayan* serial to revive its marginalized and much-maligned brand of cultural nationalism, *Hindutva* which derives from definitions of India as an exclusively Hindu civilization in origin The BJP cleverly manipulated the public adulation of the *Ramayan* serial by drawing attention to a long-standing dispute over the site of a sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya called the *Babri Masjid*, which is also claimed to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram, the lead character in the *Ramayan* epic. In Chapter Two, 'Prime Time Religion' Rajagopal analyzes the unprecedented popularity of the television serial *Ramayan*, which he claims, rekindled the *Hindutva* movement's dormant campaign for the liberation of *Ramjanmabhumi* (the birthplace of Ram), and led to the subsequent destruction of the Babri mosque. He writes, 'the serial reformulated the epic in a revivalist manner, projecting a proto-national security state back into the vedic past' (p. 28). Through close reading of the televisual strategies employed in the *Ramayan* series, Rajagopal deftly demonstrates how Hindu nationalists could use its latent appeal in blatant ways to inflame the passions of sympathetic audiences

In Chapter Three, 'The Communicating Thing and its Public', Rajagopal traces the history of television as a cultural commodity in the modern nation-state of postcolonial India. He argues that television functioned as 'a desirable commodity that pointed to other desirable commodities' (p 123) by symbolizing for its audiences all the good things that modernity could bring. Drawing on interviews with people who watched *Ramayan* on Doordarshan, he outlines the ways in which the television epic engendered contradictory and ambivalent responses about religious traditions and modern nationalism among its culturally diverse audience Nevertheless, he argues, *Ramayan* enabled large numbers of the national audience who did not share any single political ideology to identify with the images and themes of its weekly telecasts.

In Chapter Four, 'A "Split Public" in the Making and Unmaking of the Ramjanmabhumi Movement', Rajagopal explores the contradictory trajectories of the national English press and the vernacular print media in India. The frequent divergence in their coverage of the Ramjanmabhumi movement, he posits, contributed to the formation of a 'split public' in India Therefore, Rajagopal reasons, the emergence and consolidation of the Hindu nationalist

movement can be found in the cultural fissures between the English
language and vernacular press, where 'the criticism and fear from the
former' indirectly reinforced 'the sympathy offered by the latter'
(p 29). In Chapter Five, 'Organization, Performance and Symbol',
Rajagopal traces the changing character of Hinduism under the
banner of Hindu nationalism. He describes how the Hindu
nationalists strategically deploy a variety of elements from Hinduism
in order to garner popular support for their cause Since Doordarshan
was directly under state supervision, and television was unavailable
to the Hindu nationalists for propaganda, they turned to alternative
media such as videotape, audiocassette, brochures and pamphlets
which provided additional commentary on the inflammatory speeches
given at large public rallies. Rajagopal finds that these propaganda
materials were essential for the Hindu nationalists to couch their
politics under the garb of religion, and rearticulate their political
aspirations in the Ramjanmabhumi movement as the religious
sentiments of the Hindu majority seeking its rightful place in the
national mainstream In the final chapter, 'Hindutva Goes Global',
Rajagopal describes the transnational networks which contribute to
the growth of Hindu nationalism within India and beyond He
examines the global reach of organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu
Parishad (VHP) which draw support for various religious and
political activities from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) living in
countries such as the USA. By focusing themes of cultural heritage,
religious identity and national pride, Rajagopal finds that
organizations such as the VHP have successfully established a
worldwide network of supporters which fuels its political, economic
and cultural aspirations globally

One of the most significant contributions of this book is
Rajagopal's formulation of the 'split public', which is crucial for
understanding the heterogeneous character of Indian media and the
diversity of opinions they engender in politics and popular culture
However, it is surprising that he only speaks of a split *public* rather
than split *publics* – in the plural, given the plurality of voices one
encounters in his analysis of the English-language media and the
vernacular press in India. For instance, his critique of the English-
language media – as unwitting enablers due to their blanket
opposition to Hindu nationalism – and the vernacular media – as
sympathetic advocates due to their nuanced representation of
Hindutva sentiments – seems too dichotomous, and does not account
for several newspapers which, as Rajagopal concedes, do not fall
neatly on either side of this 'split public' equation To continue with
the theme of diversity in the national public culture, it would have
been very illuminating if Rajagopal had situated the influence of the
Ramayan series in relation to a number of other equally significant
Hindu epics that followed in the wake of its success on Doordarshan,
the most notable among them being *Mahabharat*. Although

Rajagopal briefly refers to the *Mahabharat* serial in his analysis of the *Ramayan* telecasts, a more detailed analysis is required to comprehend the intricacies of their relationship, and their combined influence on the growth of Hindu nationalist sentiment in Indian politics and public culture. Perhaps that is the subject for another book on this fascinating area of inquiry that television has brought to the fore in India today. Rajagopal and Mankekar have made invaluable contributions to the study of television in India, and one hopes they will return to these topics in the near future

Greg Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp and American Film Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, 198 pp.

MARK JANCOVICH

Artists in the Audience is a major contribution to reception studies, demonstrating the centrality of 'cult' and 'camp' to the formation of film studies and 'highbrow' film culture more generally Greg Taylor examines the strategies of film critics Manny Farber and Parker Tyler in order to clarify the origins of 'vanguard' film criticism. However, as Taylor demonstrates, these strategies were not 'as playful and innocent as they seem' but 'arose as a reactionary gesture, a pointed response to consumer-friendly postwar modernism on the part of disaffected highbrow critics eager to assert their relevance to a cultural scene that had seemingly abandoned them' (pp. 5–6)

Rather than simply celebrating mass culture, these critics violated 'normative middlebrow taste distinctions' and 'reclaimed art as a pragmatic, transformative activity. It was something you as a modern spectator did with the world around you' (p 153). In other words, they asserted that aesthetic value did not lie in the text itself but in the aesthetic gaze As Pierre Bourdieu has put it 'If the work of art is indeed, as Panofsky says, that which "demands to be experienced aesthetically", and if any object, natural or artificial can be perceived aesthetically, how can one escape the conclusion that it is the aesthetic intention [of the viewer] which "makes" the work of art . . . that it is the aesthetic point of view that creates the aesthetic object'.[1] However, while Bourdieu makes this observation to challenge aesthetic authority, Tyler and Farber used it to enshrine that authority and to place the critic at the centre of cultural power

Taylor's study starts out from this premiss but also provides a detailed analysis of Farber's and then Tyler's criticism. In the process, he distinguishes between the connoisseurship of Farber's

1 Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans Roger Nice (London Routledge 1984)

cultism, in which the critic searches out moments of brilliance from the otherwise undifferentiated mass of movies, and the interpretative dynamics of Tyler's camp, in which any movie can be '"activated" as art by the camp spectator's creative, resistant interpretation' (p. 16). The book then moves on to examine their legacy through their encounters with the auteurism of Sarris, the French new wave and American 'underground' culture. Finally, Taylor examines the ways in which vanguard critics have retreated into the academic world of high theory As Taylor observes, 'if Manny Farber and Parker Tyler are all but unknown to today's film scholars, it is hard to image film scholarship, or indeed *Mystery Science Theatre*, without them' (p. 7).

In the process, Taylor provides a fascinating account not only of the origins of cult and camp but also of film studies itself, and it is one that identifies one of the central problems for vanguard film criticism As Taylor puts it 'while the avant-gardist may cherish the *idea* of popular aesthetic emancipation, in practice such emancipation will only leave him behind. He thus remains doomed to respond to his own success by retreating into obscurity and complaining of co-optation' (p 145).

The problem with Taylor's account is that while he presents himself as overtly opposed to vanguard criticism, he also yearns for objective standards of value and complains: 'Today's highbrow film critic does not presume to evaluate; he merely explicates and interprets. He does not put down movies, he recognizes and respects their hermeneutic complexity and aesthetic legitimacy' (p. 150) However, such a position is disingenuous. As Taylor is fully aware, the highbrow critic does not avoid evaluation but is constantly establishing distinctions As he himself observes, the 'dim middlebrows who still refuse to see any conflict between commodification and aesthetics may have given Andy Lloyd Webber his knighthood, but they are the hidden pariahs of our increasingly vanguard culture, derided equally for their weakness in the face of faux art and for their apparent inability to master the empowering artistic gesture' (p. 151).

The problem with cultism is not that it lacks discrimination but that it produces distinctions that implicitly work to establish social and cultural authority, to declare what is legitimate 'and what can be governed and policed as illegitimate, inadequate or even deviant'.[2] It is not the absence of evaluation that is the problem but rather the ways in which social groups are oppressed and othered by cultural distinctions [3]

Furthermore, Taylor's work seems to run counter to many of the key trends within reception studies Most significantly, he reverts to the 'disdain' through which film reviews used to be seen as 'just pieces of failed criticism' rather than 'types of social discourse which, like film advertisements, can aid the researcher in ascertaining

2 Andrew Ross, *No Respect Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York Routledge, 1989), p 61

3 See for example Mark Jancovich, 'Naked ambition pornography taste and the problem of the middlebrow Scope an Online Journal of Film Studies June 2001, URL http //www nottingham ac uk/film /journal, Joanne Hollows The masculinity of cult' in Mark Jancovich Antonio Lazaro Julian Stringer and Andrew Willis (eds) *Defining Cult Movies the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester Manchester University Press forthcoming)

4   Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning History Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington, IN Indiana University Press, 1994) p 69

the material conditions informing the relation between film and spectator at given moments'.[4] In other words, while reception studies such as Barbara Klinger's *Melodrama and Meaning* examine film reviewing and academic criticism to demonstrate that there is no inherent meaning or value within a text itself and to examine the ways in which texts are made to operate within specific historical conditions, Taylor wants simply to challenge specific critics in order to establish objective critical standards

> Critics are needed, quite simply, to help build and maintain a constituency for film art. Here the Arnoldian ideal of critical disinterestedness – seeing the movie itself as it 'really is' – might just serve as a corrective to the impulse for oppositional fandom, encouraging sensitive response and honest, tough appraisal instead of patronizing affection and relaxed standards. (p. 157)

However, the problems of vanguardism are not resolved by the search for objective standards that would allow the emergence of an authoritative elite of critics On the contrary, this is itself a vanguardist ambition.

As a result, while critics such as Farber and Tyler acknowledged that 'it is the aesthetic point of view that creates the aesthetic object' and so exposed themselves to Bourdieu's critique of aesthetic judgement, Taylor does not pursue this critique Instead he simply seeks to reverse the process to deny that it is 'the aesthetic point of view that creates the aesthetic object' and to search for a set of objective standards that will reimbue the object with aesthetic value.